



# DAKOTA STAFFING



## Performance Counseling - The Basics

Dealing with performance problems can be challenging. Even experienced supervisors often say it is one of the toughest parts of their jobs. Nevertheless, it's important for several reasons:

- Poor performance usually only gets worse over time—rarely does it correct itself without action.
- Given early and regularly, performance counseling leads to performance improvement and eliminates the need to consider more formal action.
- Taking action against one employee's poor performance often leads to a more productive work environment.

A counseling session can be used to address:

1. A specific incident
2. An aspect of an employee's performance which you have identified as needing improvement
3. The employee's overall performance or conduct

Performance counseling doesn't require special skills. It generally begins with a verbal counseling session, during which you review performance expectations and talk with the employee about specific areas in which they aren't meeting standards.

When planning a counseling session:

- Be sure to allow enough time for your comments and any feedback from the employee.
- When possible, conduct the conversation in a private place where the employee will not be embarrassed if the conversation is overheard by coworkers.
- Know what guidance the employee has previously been given on performance. Use any tools available, such as an operating manual or written performance standards that can be reviewed.



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## The Performance Counseling Session

1. Start with what's happening - be specific, factual and honest.  
Example: Rather than, "you're showing up late" say, "You were late twice last week and once this week."
2. Tell the employee what you expect, and why those are your expectations.  
For example: I expect you to wear your safety glasses whenever you're cleaning the tubes. If splashed in your eye, the cleaner we use can burn and blind you. I want you to be safe and your coworkers around you to be safe. And, it's a practice we must follow in order to keep our insurance.
3. Explain the impact their actions/not meeting expectations are having.  
Example: "The line can't be started until everyone is in place, when you are late it puts the entire line behind." focusing on how the employee's performance fits into the performance of the total organization.
4. Ask the employee for their perspective.
5. Next, ask them what they can do to improve, or fix the problem. When you ask an employee for their perspective, they sometimes get a little defensive and can have a lot of excuses why they aren't performing up to standards. Keep the focus on performance expectations, and work to clarify what future good performance looks like.  
For example: "Sounds like you have a lot of issues that can prevent you from getting to work by your scheduled time. What can you do to be here on time, because that's a requirement and you were hired with the expectation that you would be on time. I hope that you're able to fulfill that commitment."
6. Tell them your expectations and what needs to be achieved in the future - including what will happen if their performance doesn't change (if they don't fix the problem).
7. Ask for their commitment – get them to say it. This makes any later decisions you'll have to make and conversations with the employee easier.
8. Try to end the session on a positive note. Remind the employee know that you will both benefit when their performance improves – they keep their job and your organization keeps a valuable employee.
9. Follow-up. If their performance improves or they fix the problem, be sure to thank them for honoring their commitment.