

Underperforming Employees

How to remotely manage underperforming employees during the Coronavirus pandemic.

The coronavirus pandemic currently affecting the country has created a type of 'lockdown', after the Government announced that workers should only leave the house to travel to and from work where absolutely necessary. This means that businesses have needed to accommodate homeworking where possible, and there is now an unprecedented amount of people working from home.

An increase of home working may cause some businesses and managerial roles cause for concern where it comes to managing underperforming staff. Most employees will be hard working and conscientious, although you find yourself in the position where you suspect some employees are not pulling their weight or meeting targets or expectations.

How will you know if an employee is underperforming?

The first thing you will need to consider is how you can effectively assess an employee's performance. For example, have you spotted that the employee is taking liberties with social media or have you been unable to reach them when needed? You should ensure you have procedures in place for monitoring an employee's performance, before taking any potential action against them. This may include monitoring the following:

- how many emails the worker is sending
- the number of phone calls
- financial performance
- targets or output
- ability to meet deadlines

If you are not able to monitor an employee by any of the above examples, there is an alternate method you could use. This involves providing employees with a reward of further home working in future 'non-crisis' times if this period goes well. You may want to suggest that there may be a business case for remote working, but it must show that employees are productive during this period, so you place the responsibility back on the employees to improve.

If you suspect an employee is underperforming you need to ensure you can evidence this properly before proceeding further.

Once you have established a concern is legitimate and genuine, you can then consider what course of action you should take.

How should you address these concerns with the employee?

It is important to remember that these are difficult times for employees as well as businesses, and a decrease in productivity could be linked to mental health problems exacerbated by home working. The focus should be on assisting the employee, and a more positive approach will almost always give better results than a negative approach.

Your approach should include the following:

1. Start with a conversation to find out what may be causing the decreased productivity.
2. Ask the employee if they are finding things difficult.
3. Consider whether there could be any distractions at home, such as childcare.
4. Offer to help the employee and be supportive.
5. Be careful not to use a heavy-handed or distrustful approach as this could have a damaging impact on staff morale and engagement.
6. Place trust in the employees to manage their own workloads.

If you still have concerns with an employee after adopting a positive approach and there are further signs of decreased productivity and underperformance, then you could consider whether formal disciplinary action should be taken. In that instance, you should treat the situation like any other disciplinary proceeding by following the ACAS Code of Conduct and relevant guidelines.



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