

Helping Managers Who Don't Perform--Practically, Firmly, Finally

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by Steve Bruce

Category: [HR Management](#)

[Yesterday's Advisor](#) offered consultant Paul Falcone's practical approach for dealing positively with poor performing managers. Today, more of his tips, plus an introduction to the guide especially written for the small—or even one-person—HR department.

[\[For Day 1 suggestions, go here.\]](#)

Day 2 (AM): The 1-on-1 Meeting with Wilma & Fred (Poor-Performing Manager and Supervisor)

I've got three rules I'll ask you to follow as we begin this meeting.

First, don't hold anything back. This is a once-in-a-career benefit, and the purpose of this meeting is to get it all out there.

Second, whatever you say has to be said in a spirit of positive and constructive criticism. There's no need for attacking or defending—we're simply focusing on how to fix this now that we've gotten the what out into the open (yesterday).

Third, I'll ask you both to assume good intentions now that you've walked a mile in each other's moccasins. Wilma, you can't change Fred, and Fred, you can't change Wilma.

But I'll ask you both to determine what you could change about your own behavior to elicit a different response in the other from this point forward.

Then after that, I'm welcoming you both back to the company as if it were your first day—Clean slate, new beginning, and a chance to reinvent yourselves as a leadership team.

At that point, we'll call a group meeting, and you'll both be able to make commitments for a new beginning, consider apologizing, and find a way to heal the wounds that exist.

Now let me give you the overview of what Sue and I heard yesterday in meetings with you both as well as select members of your team.

Oh, and please speak to each other in the first person as if Sue and I weren't here (as opposed to third-person "he—she" dialog constructions).

Your close: "I'm not expecting you to become best friends or sing Kumbaya together. But I need to know that communication and morale won't suffer and things won't fall through the cracks because you refuse to speak with one another or in any way perpetuate this ongoing animosity. Agreed?"

At the conclusion of the 1-on-1 meeting between the manager and supervisor (and depending on what is said in the meeting), hold the group session.

Managing an HR Department of One was recently recognized as one of SHRMStore's "Great 8" best-selling products. [Find out what all the buzz is about.](#)

Broker the Group Meeting to Heal the Wounds and Reset Expectations

HR: "Everyone, here's a recap of what I've learned. I really appreciate your coming forward and sharing your thoughts with me, and I'm reminding everyone of two important things.

First, once this investigation is over, it's over. You can't conduct your own mini-investigation to see who said what because that violates our code of ethics.

Second, while I realize there may be some hurt feelings or tension in certain relationships, there can be absolutely nothing that looks or feels like retaliation for anyone having spoken with me at my request and in good faith.

Retaliation is a separate and far more serious offence than anything we'll be discussing today, and it could be considered a "summary offense," meaning it could lead to immediate dismissal. So please don't go anywhere near that "third rail" issue. Everyone agreed? (Yes)

Then the various parties, including the director, share what they have committed to.

Corrective Action Documentation, Training, and Follow-Up

Finally, HR will have to issue final, written warnings for egregious misconduct (even for a first-time offense), including lastchance agreement language if warranted. Plan on regular follow-up, and set expectations for dramatic improvement.

Corrective action for poor-performing managers—certainly part of your job description these days, but equally certainly not your only challenging duty. From hiring to firing, HR's never easy, and *in a small department, it's just that much tougher*.

BLR's [*Managing an HR Department of One*](#) is unique in addressing the special pressures small HR departments face. Here are some of its features:

- **Explanation of how HR supports organizational goals.** This section explains how to probe for what your top management really wants and how to build credibility in your ability to deliver it.
 - **Overview of compliance responsibilities,** through a really useful, 2-page chart of 23 separate laws that HR needs to comply with. These range from the well-known Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), and new healthcare reform legislation, to lesser-known, but equally critical rules, such as Executive Order 11246. Also included are examples of federal and state posting requirements. (Proper postings are among the first things a visiting inspector looks for—especially now that the minimum wage has been repeatedly changing.)
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