

NEOGOV

35 Tips for Performance Improvement Plans *that Produce Positive Results*

Performance Improvement Plans (PIPs) are often met with dread by both employees and managers. They have a reputation for being an express train to termination, but that doesn't have to be the case. They can be positioned as a support framework that provides employees with an opportunity to improve in specific areas where they are struggling.

Because of their delicate nature, **HR should provide guidance to all managers on how to write a PIP,** how to communicate it verbally, and the preferred method of documentation. A balanced approach should strike an equally urgent and hopeful tone so that the employee takes the action seriously, but doesn't lose faith in their ability to turn things around.

These 35 tips will help HR and managers address employee performance in a productive manner that is more likely to yield positive results.

BEST PRACTICES

1. Make sure your expectations are both **objective and attainable**. They should be based on what is required of the role as opposed to an idealized version of it.
2. **Give the employee enough time** to demonstrate improvement. This should be a consideration when coming up with a PIP timeline.
3. **Reassure the employee** that the goal of the PIP is to ensure they have what they need to succeed so that the larger organization can also succeed. They should feel well-equipped and supported, but also accountable.
4. Make the employee aware that **the results of not meeting the goals** outlined may have serious consequences.
5. Establish and express your expectations in detail with **tangible goals and a timeline**.
6. **Allow enough time** for a larger conversation about the employee's successes and challenges.
7. Take a moment to **recognize what the employee does well** and where they are thriving. This can help build the self-confidence they'll need to work on the areas where they aren't thriving.
8. **Motivate the employee** by sharing the potential you see in them. Be honest though, you don't want to mislead them.
9. **Don't be vague.** These conversations can be difficult, but you must be able to point to specifics not only to make an employee understand where they are falling short, but also how they can improve.
10. **Resist emotional reactions** or arguments as much as possible. Be aware that the employee may be defensive, and it is up to you to keep a calm demeanor.
11. **Do not provide the PIP in writing until the end of your meeting.** This gives you an opportunity to make changes based on your discussion.

PREPARING THE PIP

12. Identify the **specific performance or behaviors** that need improvement before bringing it up to the employee. Jot down specific examples and dates (or at least a general timeline) so that you can easily reference them.
13. Explain the **impact of the behavior** or performance that needs improvement. Frame it within the context of the employee's larger team or the organization as a whole.
14. Develop a list of **short-term, timeboxed goals** that need to be met based on the shortcomings you've outlined. Focus on measurable results -- e.g., "at least 10 completed reports per week," or "fewer than 3 clerical errors for the next 30 days."
15. Next, come up with a list of **tips and resources** that can help the employee reach their goals. For example, you might recommend setting a calendar reminder to take care of a daily task or assign a training course from your LMS on a relevant topic.
16. **Set up a formal meeting** with the employee to discuss the specifics of a PIP. Avoid Fridays to eliminate the possibility of questions coming up that the employee must wait an entire weekend to ask.

DURING THE PIP MEETING

17. Start with an **overview of the meeting's purpose**. Skip the niceties and get straight to the point so you don't lose your focus. If you think you might stumble through it, create a script ahead of time so your delivery is crisp.
18. Before you get into detail, **explicitly state that the objective** is to help the employee successfully meet the requirements of the position.
19. Make the employee **aware of their rights** with respect to the PIP (this should come from your HR department).
20. **Describe in detail the performance or behavioral issues**, using the specific examples (already documented) that you gathered before meeting with the employee.
21. Contrast the issues with the **expectations of the role**.
22. Remember to pause and **allow time for the employee to ask questions** or respond to statements made.
23. Ask if there are any **specific reasons they've had challenges**. This could be anything from personal issues to a colleague with a difficult personality.
24. **State the goals or milestones** that need to be achieved to meet the requirements of the position and a timeline for meeting them.
25. Ask whether **additional training** or other **resources** would be helpful and note them.
26. **Reiterate the deadline** and be clear about scheduling check-ins. If possible, add the follow-up meetings to the calendar right then.

AFTER THE PIP MEETING

27. **Recap the meeting in writing** so that you have your own personal record of it. Don't assume that you'll remember all the details weeks or months later.
28. Follow up on any **training or resources** that you need to obtain for the employee to be successful.
29. **Inform other stakeholders** (your manager, HR, etc.) of the outcome including objectives and timeline.
30. Once the timeline is set, stick to it. **Check in regularly** to see how they are progressing.

FOLLOWING UP

31. Be just as diligent and **respectfully candid** about progress in your follow ups with the employee as you were in the first meeting.
32. Prior to the deadline, **gather the data you need** to make an assessment on whether the employee was successful or not. Do not go into the final meeting without knowing where you stand.
33. **Assess the employee's success** based on the criteria you set in the first meeting. Do not add additional parameters or change the measurements of success once they've been agreed upon.
34. **If successful, provide positive feedback** to the employee while also reiterating that the performance is expected to remain at this level going forward.
35. **If not successful, meet with HR** and other stakeholders to discuss next steps.