

HR Department Toolkit



Coaching and Counseling to Reinforce and Redirect Employee Performance

Part 2

Conducting the Redirection Coaching Session

But first review these six steps for what you're trying to accomplish in the session:

A 6-step Coaching Approach

As a summary, it is to:

1. Gather and verify the performance issues information and decide if proceeding is worth your time or with hassling the employee. Act on facts, not on rumors or suppositions.
2. Meet with the employee and get agreement on what's happened or what hasn't happened (see step 1).
3. Get agreement on whose problem it really is. It's both yours and the employee's because of your limited management choices for action that includes them, which helps their compliance.
4. Ask for solutions. It's important for the employee to not only recognize that it is their problem but that they also have to except the responsibility of creating potential solutions for their problem.
5. Evaluate the problem's potential solutions; agree on the best alternative and then on what will happen and when.
6. Monitor progress and give feedback to additionally correct and/or to reinforce.

To illustrate how the outline works, we'll hypothetically assume an employee named "Megan", has had a recent history of being late to work for her shifts on several occasions. You have determined that this is not merely a minor problem that might be due to new employee confusion or some miscommunications with scheduling and that her tardy behavior has become disruptive to your salon. What follows here is a dialogue of what the manager says to Megan about the issue and how Megan might possibly answer and in turn how the manager uses the session to accomplish the eight-point counseling agenda.

Manager (you): Megan, do you know why I've called you in?

Megan: No.

Manager: I've called you in because we have a problem.

Megan: What problem?

Manager: It's about your job performance.

Megan: I thought I was doing pretty good! After all you gave me a raise six months ago. I work harder than anybody else in the salon!

Manager: It has to do with your being late to work. Do you know how many times you have been late in the last week?

Megan: Yeah, yeah, I know. I'll take care of it.

Manager: I'm glad of that, but do you know how many times you have been late? *(Note your positive response as reinforcement to her reaction "I'll take care of it.")*

Megan: Probably once or twice.

Manager: Based on the number of days you worked the last two weeks, which was 8 shifts, you were on time only four times. That averages out to you being late every other shift you work.

Megan: I didn't realize it was that often.

Manager: Do you agree that there is a problem? *(You are trying to get her agreement that a problem exists.)*

Megan: I agree it's a lot, but after all, I work harder than anybody else... *(She's trying to justify.)*

(Note: She obviously doesn't agree it's a problem and because she hasn't it's necessary for you to get her to understand the results of her unacceptable actions).

Manager: When you are late for work do you know how late you usually are?

Megan: I don't know ... maybe five to ten minutes.

Manager: It varies from 15 minutes to 1 hour. *(Keep silent and wait for her response. Look at her with expectation.)*

Megan: I didn't know it was that bad, but as I said already; I'll take care of it.

Manager: I appreciate hearing that but first, does that mean you agree it is a problem? *(Looking for agreement as in Step Two.)*

Megan: I don't think it is a problem when you consider the amount of work I do compared to everybody else. *(By her view it's "no harm, no foul" so move into how it affects you, the salon and ultimately her. You're still trying to ID the problem.)*

Manager: Do you know what happens when you're late?

Megan: Well, you get mad, for one thing.

Manager: Mad, yes, but mostly disappointed. But what else happens?

Megan: *(Probably after a few minutes of silence...)* Well, I heard there were a couple of employees who couldn't take their breaks or leave their shift on time.

Manager: That's right. What else?

Megan: *(Perhaps after several minutes of silence...)* I don't know, what?

Manager: If customers can't check in quick enough, what do you think they do?

Megan: They come back later?

Manager: Maybe, but what else might they do?

Megan: Okay, okay, they could, I suppose, you're going to say they could go to another salon, right?

Manager: You're right. I've personally received phone calls and listened to people who have complained about slow check-ins and a line of customers ahead of them.

Megan: Yeah, that's not good.

Manager: How do you think other employees who usually come to work on time react?

Megan: I guess they could think it's unfair.

Manager: You're right. Some employees have complained to me about special treatment.

Megan: Who said something to you? *(Now she's trying to focus on the "tattle tails" and not the problem.)*

Manager: That's not relevant to this conversation. We're talking about your job actions, not theirs. Now, do you know what happens to me when you're late for work so often?

Megan: Well, I suppose you have to run the counter or fill in.

Manager: Yes, but even worse is that my boss eventually knows when you or other employees are late and want to know why I can't do a better job of managing my people.

Megan: I didn't know that. That figures.

Manager: Now do you agree that it's a problem?

Megan: Well, I guess when you put that all together I suppose it's a problem.

*(Note: Great! You just got through Step Number 2, **Getting Agreement That a Problem Exists**. Now you are ready for Step Number 3, which is agreeing on whose problem it is. But what if Megan hadn't agreed it was a problem and had said...)*

Megan: Well, I understand all of that but I still don't think it's a big deal because I do more work in a shift than others do anyhow. You told me at review time six months ago that I hardly ever make any errors and that my sales work was the best in the salon. If I get my work done and make sales, why are you hassling me just because I've been late a few times?

(Note: Stop! If what she says to you sounds like a good argument, it might be logical to let her off the hook. But then I might ask why you didn't decide that before you got started, before you

wasted your time and Megan's time. Now you look foolish. Stop the discussion and don't get involved in it in the future unless **it really is worth your time**).

(But if **you must** decrease the lateness, proceed with the **Consequences**.)

Manager: Let me ask you a question. What do you think will happen if you continue to come to work late? (Now trying to get agreement on consequences to get agreement on the overall problem.)

Megan: Well, I guess you'll get more complaints from everyone.

Manager: You're right. What else?

Megan: Your bosses will get on your back.

Manager: Absolutely. They'll be convinced that I'm not doing my job as a manager. But what else?

Megan: I guess the other employees will still complain.

Manager: Right again. They'll complain more and ask for somebody to do something about it. Some of them may even come in late themselves or they might go over my head. And then what?

Megan: OK, I suppose I could get fired.

Manager: You're right; I need people in the salon who will do what has to be done and there is no reason why that shouldn't be you because you can do it. Now do you see where we have a problem? In my job I don't have the discretion to allow some employees to freely break the rules and others to be reprimanded.

Megan: Yes, I agree that it's a problem.

(Note: This conversation is, of course, threatening to Megan. There is a clear difference, however, between your threat to take her job away, and her recognizing the consequences of her actions. Threats per se usually do not work. Sometimes the threatened worker responds with a resignation on the spot. If getting fired is a realistic consequence of the employee's unsatisfactory behavior, then it's important (and only fair) that he or she be made aware of the consequences and that their behavior limits the management options available to you.)

(In most cases after these consequences have been verbalized, the subordinate will agree a problem exists and that it directly affects them. In this case, Megan has now agreed that there is a problem and who's problem it is. Steps 2 and 3 are now accomplished. Step 4 seeks solution.)

Manager: I'm glad of that. Now, how can we solve it?

Megan: Well, I'll come to work on time.

Manager: But what will you do differently to make sure that you do arrive on time? If what you are doing now is getting you to work late, what will you have to do different so you will arrive at work on time?

Megan: I don't know. I'll have to think about it and get back to you. *(She's avoiding problem solving.)*

Manager: No, this is not a problem that can wait. Is the reason you're late for some shifts different from morning, afternoon or evening shifts?

Megan: Well, yeah, it is. I've been late in the morning because my roommate wants to stay up late and party nearly every night of the week. Some mornings when I am supposed to be here in the salon to open at 9:00 am, she's been playing music and being rowdy until 2 or 3 in the morning. Sometimes she and her buddies stay up to watch the sunrise!

Manager: So what do you do about that?

Megan: I suppose I can kick her out, but she's my best friend. *(Still step 5 evaluating various solutions.)*

Manager: Well, that's one solution. Short of losing your best friend, what else can you do?

Megan: I guess I could ask her to party somewhere else on the nights before I have to work.

Manager: Excellent idea. After all, if you're to continue in this job and earn money to pay your portion of the expenses, she should help you get enough sleep to allow that.

Megan: That makes sense.

Manager: Will she think so?

Megan: She has no choice. Like I have no choice. *(Finally, she is recognizing the problem and whose responsibility it is to correct it.)*

Manager: Like I have no choice but to see your positive change to this problem. How about the times you've been late for other shifts? What causes those problems?

Megan: Mostly because of my car.

Manager: What's wrong with it?

Megan: Nothing. Keri, my roommate, keeps borrowing it and doesn't bring it back when she says she will.

Manager: So what can you do about that?

Megan: Same, I guess as her late night craziness. She will have to change and bring my car back when it's promised.

Manager: What else can you do about Keri and your car?

Megan: Not let her use the damned thing.

Manager: Right. After all, Keri's actions or lack of actions effect your actions, which affect mine.

Megan: Maybe I could use your help to talk to Keri. *(Avoidance of problem responsibility.)*

Manager: Keri's not my employee. She directly affects you, not me. Your actions are the only ones I'll take responsibility for or that I can control.

(Note: Coaching an employee through their work-related personal issues is important, but never take ownership of the problem. If you take the monkey off their back, you'll ultimately find your salon office or workspace a zoo of everyone's personal agendas and excuses.)

Megan: You're right. I guess I have to be strong enough to face her. After all, I need to keep my job.

(Note: Wonderful! You've stated the problem, got agreement that there is a problem and who's it is, and the best part, the employee has drawn their own conclusions [somewhat with your help] of what they need to do to redirect their own behavior. And this all happens without "writing up" someone's warning, actually firing them and then having to deal with the ultimate consequences of re-interviewing and re-hiring of replacement employees and other potential headaches of terminations.)

The last piece in the agreement of a solution process is the timing of what will happen and when.

Manager: So, all of your ideas sound great. But when will you talk to Keri and when will I see compliance to the schedule?

Megan: Give me a week or two and I'll break it to Keri. This will give her time to find someone else's car to borrow. *(Procrastination)*

Manager: I appreciate your commitment to do what needs to be done, but a week or two is not acceptable to our customers, your peers, or to my boss and me.

(Note: The timing of a solution needs to have a sense of urgency and can't be tabled for future discussion or it has no teeth!)

Megan: Well, I suppose I can talk to her tonight after I get off work.

Manager: You "suppose?" *(You need a specific commitment.)*

Megan: Okay, I will.

Manager: Good, because I will expect that you will work out these issues and that you will, from now on, be on time per the posted schedule. And that will keep everyone happy and allow us to continue to appreciate how good you are with the customers. It's your greatest strength.

(Note: Stating your positive expectations of the employee's adherence to positive change and reinforcing everything by re-stating a previous review highlight, "good with customers," that praised Megan for excellent face-to-face service is a set-up for success.)

Summary:

1. Gather and verify the performance issues information and decide if proceeding is worth your time or with hassling the employee. Don't act on rumors or suppositions.
2. Meet with the employee and get agreement on what's happened or what hasn't happened.
3. Get agreement on whose problem it really is. It's yours and the employees because of your limited management choices for action that includes them, which helps their compliance.
4. Ask the employee for possible solutions.
5. Evaluate the problem's potential solutions; agree on the best alternative and then on what will happen and when.
6. Monitor progress and give feedback to additionally correct and/or to reinforce.

Final Notes on Coaching & Counseling

You may discover one or more employees in your salon who do not and never will, live up to your expectations. These individuals do not influence the productivity of others or cross your discipline line, but they contribute less than other workers. For example, you might have a mature employee who has seniority but cannot adjust quickly to dramatic changes, or an employee who refuses to communicate but produces better than average work. Such employees can make your job as manager more difficult, but they are not troublemakers.

Sometimes counseling will strengthen these employees; sometimes it won't. When you have done your best to change behavior, you must continue to be positive with these employees without letting them pull you down or hurt your leadership ability.

A problem employee can cause a great deal of conversation both inside and outside your salon. If you wind up with such an employee, you can rest assured others will be watching how you respond. The non-problem employees on your staff will be watching even more closely than management. Studies show that most co-workers have a lower tolerance level to problem employees than what managers expect. Your employees want you to solve the problem to make life easier for them. Obviously, the manager who has enough leadership ability to solve the problem will enhance their own image in all directions and raise the perceived value of their team and the working environment.

Keep in mind that you are probably more important to your organization than the problem employees in question, so don't let the individual destroy you. This means you must deal with

the employee in legal ways so that both you and the organization are protected. If you need backup assistance, do not hesitate to ask for advice and support from your superiors. You are not supposed to know all the answers, so do not let personal pride to keep you from seeking support. In dealing with problem employees, it can be a serious mistake to act prematurely.