UAB The University of Alabama at Birmingham
Employee Assistance & Counseling Center

How to Document Job Performance Problems

The supervisor needs to document specific attendance, conduct, and performance problems before formally referring the employee to the EACC. Documentation helps prevent the supervisor from making subjective judgments and facilitates successful referral. Documentation includes the date, time, and place of the incident. All absenteeism, tardiness, late work, reduced production, mistakes, accidents, changes in personal appearance and hygiene, poor employee relations, long lunches, early departures, and attitude problems are to be recorded. Stick to the facts — observable behavior — do not label, judge, or diagnose when documenting. Using the Signs of a Troubled Employee page on the Critical Support website will assist in identifying specific behaviors that need documentation.

The following are examples of appropriate and inappropriate documentation:

APPROPRIATE: The employee was late today (date, time). She appeared out of proper uniform. When confronted, the employee became belligerent, saying, (statements or acts). She interrupted while being corrected and appeared unwilling to accept feedback, saying, (statements made). She then left the room slamming doors. The noise was loud enough to be heard by others who came to investigate. Two employees reported feeling fearful of this worker's behavior stating, (statements).

INAPPROPRIATE: The employee was extremely late and obviously appeared hung over. She acted inappropriate when she was confronted and said that other employees come in later than her. The employee stormed out of the room and observers were stunned by the behavior. Two employees report that domestic problems cause her tardiness.

You should consult with your HR Consultant or the HR Talent Performance & Relations department for assistance with documenting performance issues. **Remember — if it isn't written down and documented, it didn't happen.**

Making a Supervisor Disclosure

The supervisor is encouraged to contact the EACC prior to the actual confrontation with the employee. It is also recommended that the supervisor confer with their HR Consultant to ensure that every step of the referral process is in agreement with UAB policies and procedures.

The supervisor has the responsibility of referring an employee to the EACC whenever there are job performance problems that cannot be attributed to (1) a lack of competence, or (2) a lack of understanding of job expectations. The supervisor first evaluates whether the employee has the knowledge, experience, and ability to perform the job. Instead of counseling, the employee may simply need more training, a transfer to another job, or motivation inducements. Supervisors can contact HR Learning & Development for guidance on training and development opportunities.

If the employee has the competence to do the job, the supervisor verifies that the employee understands the expectations for satisfactory job performance. The employee may not be aware that his/her performance is not meeting expected standards. In this case, the supervisor conveys the expected level of performance.

When the supervisor has ruled out that job deficiencies are attributable to a lack of competence, or a failure to understand job expectations, it is appropriate to refer the employee to the EACC. It is most effective to refer the employee in the early stages of declining job performance. Supervisors can use the EACC Supervisor Referral Form as part of the referral process.

STEP 1: PREPARATION

1. Know UAB policies and procedures for performance review meetings with employees, and for implementing disciplinary actions. Don't forget to confer with your HR Consultant if there are any questions about policies and procedures.
2. Select a time and place for the discussion that facilitates privacy and no interruptions.
3. Have all attendance, conduct, and work performance problems documented and ready to review with the employee.
4. Outline changes the employee needs to make to correct performance deficiencies. Be clear about your expectations for the employee.
5. Rehearse what you want to communicate to the employee so you can remain more in control of the discussion.
6. Be prepared to cope with employee resistance, denial, excuses, defensiveness, and possible hostility.

STEP 2: MEETING

1. Be supportive — let the employee know that you want to help. Show respect and do not become angry or argumentative.
2. Review work problems with the employee. Do not accept excuses for poor work or be put off by sympathy-provoking tactics. Be careful not to give opinions about possible personal problems. Stick to specific job performance behaviors, citing concrete facts.
3. Inform the employee of what specifically needs to be done to correct job problems.
4. Explain to your employee why you are making the referral to the EACC. Base the explanation on conduct or performance issues. Emphasize that the goal is to restore the employee's productivity. Referral to the EACC is a corrective action, not a disciplinary action. Present it in a way that the employee understands that while the referral is recommended, it is also voluntary.
5. Tell the employee that the EACC will provide problem assessment, short term counseling, and referral to appropriate, affordable community resources if needed.
6. Specify further actions that will be taken if there is no performance improvement. Do not threaten.
7. Inform the employee that their EACC counselor will request a release of information form be signed, permitting the EACC to provide the supervisor with the following information: a) attendance at EACC and counseling appointments and b) recommendations resulting from the assessment. Explain this release of information is voluntary and further disciplinary actions will not result if the employee chooses not to sign a release.

STEP 3: EMPLOYEE ACCEPTANCE OR REJECTION OF EACC REFERRAL

1. If the employee agrees to be assessed by a counselor at the EACC, the supervisor can arrange the initial appointment. Also, employees sometimes delay making the appointment, or may not specify that their supervisor referred them. When the supervisor calls the EACC, it is very helpful to provide pertinent information regarding the employee referral.

2. Clarify with the employee whether the initial appointment is to be taken on the employer's time, sick leave, or vacation time.
3. Acceptance of the referral is voluntary. If the employee refuses the referral, continue to monitor employee job performance and take appropriate disciplinary measures. At each stage of the disciplinary process, encourage the employee to contact the EACC.
4. Document the discussion with the employee regarding job performance and referral to the EACC. A memo may be given to the employee stating his/her unacceptable job performance and specifying job standards for improvement. The memo should reiterate that it is recommended that the employee contact the EACC, and that attendance is voluntary, free, and confidential.

STEP 4: FOLLOW-UP

1. Continue to monitor job performance and conduct and provide the employee with appropriate feedback. Please notify the EACC about changes in the employee's job performance, or when new events occur in your department that are relevant to the employee or the referral you made to the EACC. Expect the employee to bring his/her work up to a satisfactory level. Even if the employee is using the EACC, he or she is not excused from meeting job performance or conduct expectations. Remember, the purpose of the EACC referral is to help employees return to expected levels of job performance and/or conduct. Be sure to document all follow-up actions, and all followup meetings with the employee. It creates a record that will be important if further action needs to be taken.
2. Information is shared with the supervisor/manager from the EACC only if the employee has signed a consent to release information. Even with a release, only relevant information is disclosed. The nature of the personal problem is not revealed.

Sample Script for Discussing Performance Issues & Making Referral

Thank you for meeting with me today. Let me explain the purpose of our meeting. I want to give you some important feedback on your work. I've been looking at my records for the past X months. Let me start by covering the positive areas in your work performance.

(List positive areas in employee's work performance.)

We are very appreciative of the hard work you have done in these areas, and value these assets you bring to the department.

There are, however, a couple of areas in your work that have not been as strong, and are not up to the standards that we need to see from you. I'd like to go over these areas with you, and then see if we can work out a plan to bring these areas back up to the expected level.

(List specific problem areas supported by documentation.)

These are the areas in which we'd like to see improvement. Before we move to developing a plan for improvement, I want to find out if you had any questions or comments.

(Give employee a chance to give feedback or raise questions before moving to the next step.)

The first part of developing a plan is to clarify what expectations need to be met.

(Clarify job performance or conduct expectations.)
(Clarify the time frame in which changes need to occur.)

(Work with employee to develop a plan to meet these expectations within a specified time frame.)

I need for you to be aware that we are serious about the need for these changes to occur. If this plan is not successful in bringing your work up to the level that we need to see, there may be consequences in accordance with the UAB's policies and procedures for progressive discipline.

(Outline potential consequences if the employee does not change, in accordance with progressive discipline policy. Managers should consult with their HR Consultant on progressive discipline policy.)

At this point, I want to offer you some additional help and support in meeting the department's expectations. I am referring you to the UAB Employee Assistance & Counseling Center. If there are any personal matters affecting work performance, they will offer you counseling help and support.

(Can use the Sometimes Speech here, as well — see below.)

I can't require you to go. The EACC is a voluntary program. It's not a part of the disciplinary process. Instead, it is an offer of help, made by our department in good faith. The EACC is also confidential, even when the referral is made in this way. The EACC can provide me with information only if you give written permission. Only relevant information is provided, not personal information. For instance, with a signed release, the EACC will let me know if you are attending your appointments, and if you are working on a plan to get your job back up to the expected level.

Whether you go to the EACC or not, we are going to get back together in X weeks to see what progress has been made in your work performance.

Are there any questions?

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SOMETIMES SPEECH

Sometimes job problems like these are the result of things going on outside the workplace. It may not be true in your case, and it's really none of my business. However, because it is true sometimes, UAB has the Employee Assistance & Counseling Center. The service is free and confidential. It has helped a lot of people.