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### **Getting the Better of Poor Performers**

In organizations where poor performers are (involuntarily) allowed to thrive, the levels of productivity and morale take deep plunges, and turnover increases. When organizations impose no checks on performance, top performers leave because they want to avoid associating with a management that tolerates mediocrity. With only mediocre employees staying on, the work culture evolves to accommodate mediocrity. This has a damaging, long-term effect on productivity and, even worse, the organization's reputation.

#### **Recognize the culprit**

The only good thing about poor performers is that they are easily identifiable! They arrive late, leave early, miss deadlines and find excuses for their inconsistencies. Their colleagues are left to make up for their performance

#### **Well armed!**

While some organizations realize the importance of addressing this potentially damaging problem, others ignore it. Most organizations resort to firing poor performers. However, considering the costs of selection, recruiting, and training, this appears to be a costly way out.

#### **A solution in place...**

A cost-effective alternative is to invest in 'poor performers' management training. This sort of training equips managers to deal with performance issues before they escalate and to help employees revive or restore performance. The need for such training stems from an analysis, which indicates that poor performers can turn around with rehabilitation.

#### **Erring managers?**

Some managers are incapable of managing their subordinates well. Part of this inability stems from a lack of 'poor performers' management. Some managers make the mistake of reprimanding the entire team instead of just the employee. This hurts the morale of the top performing employees in the group. Some managers believe in confronting employees. Threatening or accusing poor performing employees eventually leads to contract termination and, in bad cases, litigious problems.

#### **Performance improvement for managers too!**

Training managers to deal with poor performers will add the much-needed feather to their existing managerial skills. However, before formulating a performance management-training program, it is important to assess whether the managers require such training.

One way to determine the need is to ask specific questions during the exit interview about how managers react to poor performers. Exit interviews sometimes indicate that top performers are leaving because they are working overtime only to shield their under-performing colleagues. This is an important fact for the organization to be aware of.



## TenStep Supplemental Paper

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### The training program unfolds...

Having determined the need for such training, the next step is to design a training program. Guidelines for designing an effective performance management program include:

- **Determine when to counsel.** While most managers may resort to counseling as a last ditch effort, a few others do not even counsel! Counseling must begin when slack performance is first identified. All counseling sessions should be documented for future use. This comes in handy in case any disciplinary action or warnings need to be issued.
- **Identify the cause.** The best employee improvement strategy depends on the reason for his or her poor performance. Most organizations have employee assistance programs to deal with genuine problems such as a lack of skills or training, illness or family problems. A problem caused by attitude or poor work ethics warrants disciplinary action.
- **Provide constructive guidance.** Providing constructive criticism helps training managers tackle poor performers head on. Talking to employees about the performance gap between what is needed and what they do is an effective way of checking under-performance.
- **Know when to fire.** Despite sincere attempts, if the employee cannot be rehabilitated, he or she should be fired. However, it is vital that managers document all counseling and rehabilitation efforts to avoid termination litigation.