

Free online assistance for businesses to manage employee performance

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A free online learning course that offers advice about promoting good staff performance and effectively addressing underperformance can help employers boost the productivity of their businesses.

Fair Work Ombudsman Natalie James says that employers who establish effective performance management systems can reap significant benefits from a happy, motivated and better-performing workforce.

“Conversely, failing to address an individual employee’s underperformance appropriately and sensitively can lead to unhealthy and unproductive outcomes that can also impact on co-workers, customers and the business,” Ms James says.

“While there is no legislative obligation for workplace performance to be managed in a certain way, this new course gives employers valuable advice about simple steps they can take to get the best out of their employees.”

The Fair Work Ombudsman’s new course, *Managing Performance*, takes about 25 minutes to complete and is available in the Agency’s Online Learning Centre at www.fairwork.gov.au.

The *Promoting Good Performance* part of the course advises employers on establishing a performance system that sets clear goals and expectations for employees and provides a framework for ongoing feedback and discussion.

Topics covered include creating a performance template for the workplace, meeting with employees to develop a performance agreement, monitoring employee performance and conducting formal reviews of employee performance against agreed goals.

The course explores the importance of recognising strong performance with positive feedback and how to give constructive feedback about areas for improvement.

The *Addressing Underperformance* part of the course provides employers with a step-by-step guide for dealing with situations in which employees are not performing duties to the required standard, displaying negative behaviour or failing to comply with workplace rules or procedures.

Topics covered include approaching the initial performance discussion with the underperforming employee and formal steps for dealing with underperformance, including meetings and developing performance improvement plans.

Ms James says addressing underperformance, also known as performance management, can be challenging and confronting, but it is important.

“It is best to address underperformance issues promptly,” she said.

“The longer that poor performance is allowed to continue, the more difficult it can be to resolve and the more serious the problem may become.”

Ms James believes it’s also important to address underperformance in the right way.

“Good performance management practices can transform an underperforming employee into a strong performer. However, poorly handled performance management can increase the likelihood of legal disputes, such as unfair dismissal claims,” she said.

Ms James says dismissing a staff member because they’re not up to scratch and replacing them with another may actually cost an employer more than they realise.

“First there’s the recruitment, induction and training, but add to that the costs associated with a new employee getting used to you, the business and the rest of the staff,” she said.

“Realistically, it may be several months before a new starter’s confidence, productivity and efficiency levels match those of the underperforming employee whom they replaced! And there’s no guarantee you won’t end up back at square one.

“Attempting to manage and work through under-performance issues is not always easy, but it makes good business sense to be pro-active.

“Resolving small, isolated problems early can prevent significant workplace-wide problems developing later.”

The Fair Work Ombudsman's new website – www.fairwork.gov.au – has attracted more than 650,000 visitors since it was revamped in June and the Online Learning Centre on the website has now attracted more than 12,000 users, mostly small business operators.

Other free online courses available in the Online Learning Centre include Difficult conversations in the workplace and Hiring new employees.

The Fair Work Ombudsman's small business helpline – which launched in December to provide tailored advice to small business people – has now responded to more than 100,000 calls.

Small businesses can sign up to a regular E-newsletter from the Fair Work Ombudsman with helpful workplace tips and information.

Small business employers calling the Fair Work Infoline on 13 13 94 can opt to be put through to the helpline to receive priority service. A free interpreter service is also available on 13 14 50.

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Fair Work Online: www.fairwork.gov.au

Fair Work Infoline: 13 13 94

Need language help?

Contact the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) on 13 14 50

Hearing & speech assistance

Call through the National Relay Service (NRS):

For TTY: 13 36 77. Ask for the Fair Work Infoline 13 13 94

Speak & Listen: 1300 555 727. Ask for the Fair Work Infoline 13 13 94

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