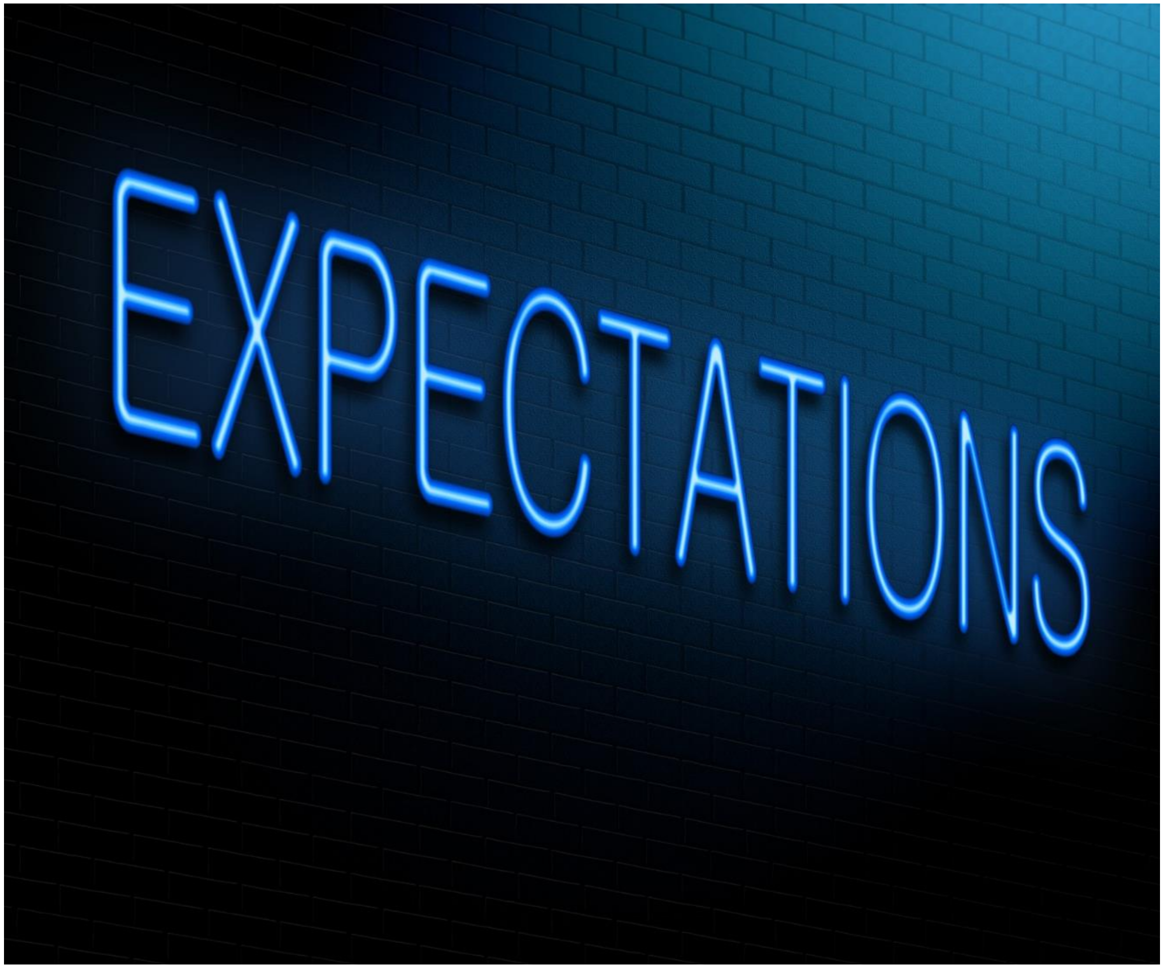
Grace Judson



Performance Improvement Plan Checklist

a leadership resource from Grace Judson

~ change leadership for successful change initiatives ~

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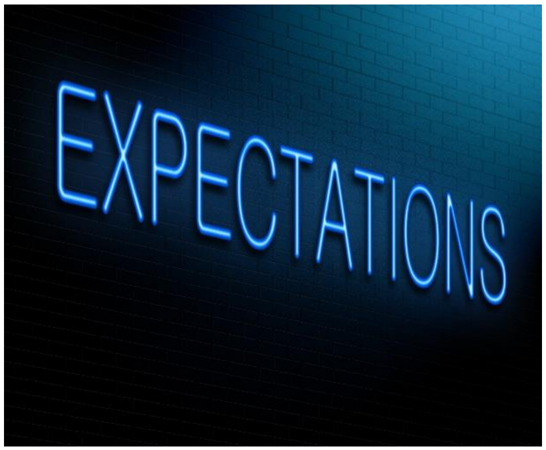
~ helping midsize companies succeed at strategic change ~



Performance Improvement Plan Checklist

Introduction

At some point in your leadership journey, you'll encounter an employee whose poor performance leaves you with no option but to place them on a formal improvement plan. This often also serves as a formal warning that their performance must improve or they risk termination.

Your Human Resources department can help you fulfill your company's requirements and process for placing an employee on a performance improvement plan (PIP). Please note that nothing included here is intended to override their suggestions or requirements.

That said, many managers begin considering a performance plan without a complete understanding of the critical steps for success.

This checklist will help you prepare for and conduct a performance plan with your employee.

Checklist

- ☐ Document the performance problem in detail, including what happened, dates, times, and outcomes.
- ☐ Document your efforts to coach and train the employee to improve, including dates, times, and outcomes.
- ☐ Confirm all conversations with a follow-up email, including what was discussed, specific action steps, expected outcomes, and completion dates.
- ☐ Document the employee's successes and failures in following through on expectations.
- ☐ Keep copies of all emails.
- ☐ Contact Human Resources to review the issue, understand company policy and procedure, and gain their support.
- ☐ Inform your manager of the situation (if necessary).
- ☐ Identify the top one, two, or three issues. An employee may be struggling in many ways, but attempting to create change on too many fronts will end in failure. Pick no more than three crucial improvement areas; stay focused.

- ☐ Write outcome-oriented objectives for performance improvement, including completion dates. (See below for examples.)
- ☐ Determine what “success” and “failure” look like. (See below for examples.)
- ☐ Document the consequences of failure. (See below for examples.)
- ☐ Plan regular meetings on a set schedule to review progress with the employee.
- ☐ Take the objectives, success/failure criteria, meeting schedule, and consequences write-ups to Human Resources for review and approval.
- ☐ Conduct a closed-door meeting with the employee to review the plan, following your company’s policies.
- ☐ Document the employee’s success or failure with each of the performance criteria.
- ☐ Conduct all the progress review meetings.
- ☐ Send follow-up emails after each review meeting documenting the discussion and outcome.
- ☐ Notify Human Resources of the outcome: either the employee succeeded (and is taken off formal performance

All objectives should have ***specificity*** *– or neither of you will recognize success or failure*

improvement), or failed (and incurs the previously-determined consequences).

- ☐ Conduct the final review meeting with the employee to notify them of the outcome.

Outcome-oriented objectives

Example:

Fred arrives between 15 and 45 minutes late every morning. He's supposed to be at his desk by 8:30, but is often not there until well after 9:00.

What NOT to write as an objective:

Fred will arrive on time.

Why this is wrong:

"On time" isn't defined. You may assume everyone knows "on time" means "8:30," but that's not sufficient.

What TO write as an objective:

Fred will arrive within five minutes of his scheduled arrivel time of 8:30 at least four out of five workdays, and will be never arrive later than 10 minutes past 8:30.

Why this is better:

This explicitly defines the window within which Fred has to be at his desk *and* allows some wiggle room for the inevitable hazards of commuting.

What else you need:

1. How will this be tracked? Will Fred sign in, punch a time clock, stop by your desk on his way in, send you an email confirming his arrival, or … ?

   Every performance objective must have a means of measurement.

2. How many days, weeks, or months will you and Fred track this outcome before you consider him successful – or decide that he's failed?

Exactly how will you know if your employee has succeeded?

Success and failure

In the section above on outcome-oriented questions, you saw an example of what success looks like for Fred – and therefore, what failure would be (anything outside the boundaries of the success criteria).

Whether someone arrives by a certain time is easy to measure.

And you need to be just as clear about what success is for less-concrete situations.

Exactly how will you know your employee has succeeded?

Example:

Amy is a technical sales support rep, which means she goes out on sales calls with the salesperson and conducts demonstrations of the product.

Amy is expected to know all the technical details of the product, and be able to answer questions from potential customers on the fly. However, she tends to freeze under pressure, sounding uncertain and giving incomplete or even incorrect answers. This has caused delays in the sales cycle and failure to close clients.

What NOT to write as success criteria:

Amy will answer all client questions quickly and correctly.

Why this is wrong:

Expecting anyone to answer all questions correctly is absurd – with a complex technical product, no one can possibly have all the answers to all possible questions.

"Quickly" is undefined. Does this mean she starts talking within two seconds? one minute? or what?

What TO write as success criteria:

Within the next two weeks, Amy will be able to answer snap quiz questions from sales reps accurately and concisely. These snap quiz questions will be on primary features of the product that Amy should know by heart.

Within the next two months, Amy will receive a rating of at least 9 out of 10 on a 1-to-10 scale of accuracy and completeness in her presentations to potential clients and their follow-up questions. This rating will be provided by the salespeople she accompanies on sales calls. In situations where she doesn't know the answer, she will commit to following up with the client. The salespeople will determine whether the question is one she should have been able to answer.

Why this is better:

These criteria (and there could be more; this is just a sample scenario) provide Amy with a two-step improvement path.

First, she practices under pressure from the sales team (who have not been happy with her, so she needs to learn to manage her performance anxiety). Then she is held to strict improvement requirements, again monitored by the sales team.

There must be consequences of failure, or ... why bother?

Consequences of Failure

Every performance improvement plan should include a clear definition of what will happen if the employee fails to fulfill the expectations for improvement, as defined by the criteria and measurements. Without this, the employee is left wondering what will happen, and may be less motivated to improve than they would be if they knew what would happen if they fail – or may be so worried and anxious about what might happen that they block themselves from improving.

The typical consequence is termination of employment. Other options include a decrease in pay, a demotion in rank, or the withdrawal of any special perks.

Rigorous and necessary

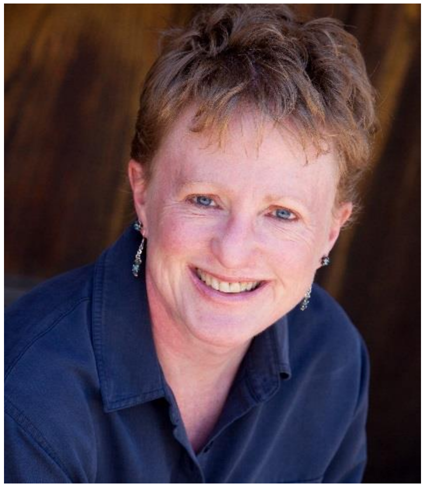
*It ain't fun, but it **is** sometimes necessary.*

It's not fun to put someone on an improvement plan, but it is sometimes necessary. And the more you follow a rigorous process – whether what's defined here, what your Human Resources department provides, or a combination of both – the more likely you, and the employee in question, will succeed.

Disclaimer:

I am not a lawyer. Please review all suggestions here with your Human Resources department for confirmation.

About the Author: Grace Judson



So, why should you pay any attention to me and what I say?

I could give you the usual sort of backstory about how I spent twentysomething years in corporate America, sixteen of them in leadership, witnessing and experiencing so much painful dysfunction, especially around change initiatives. And how that made me want, very deeply, to do what I could to make things better by helping companies get better at overcoming the inevitable resistance to change so they could actually make the improvements they want to make!

All true. But, well, yawn.

Because there are a gazillion change consultants and trainers out there who say pretty much exactly the same thing. Not very inspiring, eh?

Here's what's different about me.

I see patterns. I think in systems and process. And I understand *people.*

These are terrific skills for facilitating change leadership in organizations.

But they're not exactly common – or normal.

For a long time, I thought everyone could do this. But then I realized that being able to see patterns, think in systems, and simultaneously understand the big picture *and* the details involved, as well as understanding the people and their motivations and anxieties around change – no, it's not normal. Or common.

I'm not your "normal" change leadership expert.

I work with midsized companies who might believe they don't have the time or other resources to get help implementing essential change – and I show them how it can be done in ways that fit their culture and their needs, and develops change leaders within the organization for future change initiatives.

The tools presented in this guide are part of a powerful, confident leader's repertoire. And they're just a small taste of the learning available.

WANT MORE?

Let's talk. Click the big blue button to schedule time for a free consultation to see how I can help you succeed at change.

click here to schedule a consultation

Or follow me on LinkedIn, Facebook, or YouTube.