



the  
WELL-*Practiced*  
MANAGER

A Professional Development Resource for University Managers and Supervisors

Employee Development Office

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from the  
director

**M**anagers face many challenges but none as daunting as addressing performance problems.

We may wish for a “Manager’s Answer Book” that details exactly how to handle each and every performance problem or difficult situation we encounter, but we know no such book exists. Managing others is an art, not a science, and each situation is unique.

Managers, like everybody else, want to be liked. We want to be good leaders and we want a happy and productive work group. We can be understood—but not forgiven—for *avoiding* difficult conversations and *hoping* that nagging performance problems will go away or difficult circumstances will improve. But they rarely do.

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*Are you ready to take the risk of having a candid conversation with someone in your work group? It could be the best help you have ever given to anyone.*

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Our recommendations

- Use reflective thought and exercise good judgment.
- Ask for advice from your HR representative.
- In your conversation, remain focused on your agenda to *resolve* the problem.

Look at the situations we’ve written about in this issue and take the quiz. Some of the situations are about performance problems, while others are about complex circumstances. See if your response agrees with what we believe to be the best course of action.

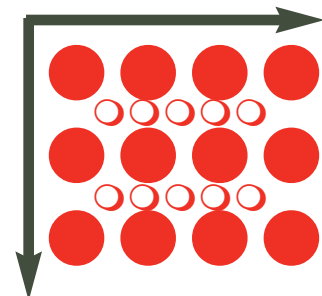
Bernie O’Kane

Performance Feedback Quiz

**What would you do?**

*In this issue, we challenge you to answer that question six times.*

*The situations we’ve described here range from simple to complex. Some choices are far more efficient, appropriate, and useful than others. Here is a hint: Most situations have two or three recommendations.*



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**Situation**

**B**everly, a new employee, has been working in your office for about eight weeks. Another member of your work group has been giving Beverly some on-the-job training and that seems to be going well. However, Beverly's personality is abrasive. She's loud. She talks a lot. She uses sarcasm when she interacts with other members of the work group. And you've noticed that people are starting to work *around* her, not *with* her.

**What do you do?**

- (a) Ignore the situation.
- (b) At the next team meeting, announce the importance of everyone getting along.
- (c) Coach Beverly on her behavioral style.
- (d) Give Beverly some clear performance expectations regarding interactions with others.
- (e) Tell Beverly what adjustments she needs to make to fit into her new culture.
- (f) Consult with HR about extending her probationary period to make sure you have time to fully evaluate her performance in context.
- (g) Meet weekly with Beverly.

**Answer**

It's likely that **D** and **E** will get results.

If not, add in **F** and **G**.

The worst choice is the non-action of **A**.

**Situation**

**C**raig is a young professional who often speaks up at team meetings to express his ideas. You want him to fully participate in these discussions, but his ideas are usually not welcomed by other members of the team.

**What do you do?**

- (a) Talk to Craig about being more reflective and selective.
- (b) At the next team meeting, talk about the importance of hearing all voices and all ideas.
- (c) Tell Craig to preview his ideas with you before talking at team meetings.
- (d) Get everyone to say why they support the ideas they do.
- (e) Clarify your meeting agenda, and clearly identify brainstorming from evaluation.
- (f) Give Craig some feedback as he tries out new behaviors at team meetings.

**Answer**

The best course of action is **A** and **E**.

If you don't get the results you want, try **F**.

All the other choices are doable, but will likely not be needed.



**Situation**

**S**usan is an ace. She is a top performer, year after year. Recently, you have observed a change in Susan's behavior. Some deadlines have slipped; she seems withdrawn and sad; and she avoids casual conversations with others.

**What do you do?**

- (a) Wait until Susan approaches you.
- (b) Wait until a problem presents itself.
- (c) Take Susan to lunch and talk with her.
- (d) Talk with Susan and let her know of your concerns.
- (e) Ask Susan if there is something she needs from you to support her.

**Answer**

Choices **D** and **E** are appropriate here.

Everyone has a right to privacy. You have an obligation to offer help and support, but it might not be wanted.



## Situation

**B**ob and James are long-standing friends who are frequently at odds with one another. Whether it's about sports, work, politics, or food, they usually disagree. Their spirited discussions are hard to miss and their distinct views are aggressively defended. The impact of their "friendly disputes" spills over onto others who work close by and who prefer a quieter pace and a more peaceful environment.

### What do you do?

- (a) Talk separately with Bob and then with James.
- (b) Talk with both Bob and James together.
- (c) Find out why they argue this way.
- (d) Tell them to stop this behavior.
- (e) Explain the "unintended results" of loud, vociferous talk at work.
- (f) Put a gag order on them.
- (g) Clarify your expectations about amount, tone, volume, and quality of communication and hold Bob and James accountable for meeting those expectations.

### Answer

To get the results you want, go with **B** and **E**.

If it doesn't work, add **G**.

Everything else is a waste of your time.

## Situation

**L**ynn is eager to gain experience that is meaningful to her and will advance her chances for promotion. She has reported to you for over two years and you have done your best during that time to provide her with assignments that increase her skills. She has succeeded with each new responsibility, but there are no new, exciting assignments in the pipeline. You need Lynn to manage and maintain an ongoing, routine year-long project that does not build her strengths or skills.

### What do you do?

- (a) Be candid with Lynn about the situation.
- (b) Let Lynn know that "she has to pay her dues."
- (c) Explain how others in the work group are also doing routine work.
- (d) Tell her this will build her character.
- (e) Offer to mentor Lynn more closely than you have in the past.
- (f) Suggest that Lynn find a mentor elsewhere in the University.

### Answer

**A** is the best choice here—almost the only choice.

You can recommend **F** to Lynn, but avoid all the other choices, because they will not serve you well.



## Situation

**M**ark has been in the job for six months and is not performing his job very well. His job is difficult to do, but you have provided lots of training and support and you know your expectations are realistic. When you've given Mark performance feedback in the past, he has always countered with reasons why the quality of his work "just can't be better." You wonder if he is the right person for the job.

### What do you do?

- (a) Settle for mediocre performance.
- (b) Provide *more* training and support.
- (c) Get a reality check: talk to HR about the situation.
- (d) Ask Mark what barriers get in his way of performing.
- (e) Collaborate with Mark on how to reduce or avoid those barriers.
- (f) Identify clearly the results you want and when he needs to produce them.
- (g) Tell him you expect him to take the lead in changing the results.
- (h) In consultation with HR, take progressive corrective action.

### Answer

**F** and **G** will give you the information you need.

Try **C**.

Your "final answer" may have to be **H**.