



# Underperforming Employee? Let Him Judge Himself First

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# **Underperforming Employee? Let Him Judge Himself First**

*Written by Larry Johnson – 4/23/19*

Working with an underperforming employee can be challenging. I recently came across an article in the *Harvard Business Review* by Sabina Nawaz titled “How to Talk to an Employee Who Isn’t Meeting Their Goals,”. She suggested an approach I really like which is to ask the employee to evaluate himself first before you make any comments on his actual performance.

I’ve always kind of poopooed this approach because I thought it was disingenuous. It’s almost like setting him up. You say, “Hey. How do you think you’re doing, buddy?” He says, “Oh, I’m doing great!” And you say, “Well, you suck!” Very soon, the employee will see he’s being set up and think, “Uh Oh, here it comes again.” That’s the dark side of this approach.

The bright side, however, is that by asking him in a genuine way, where you are truly interested in his perception, it can pave the way for better communication between you. It will also give you better tools for getting the problem solved, whatever it happens to be.

## **Earn Yourself A Hearing With An Underperforming Employee**

This is an approach to raise the odds that he will be open to any suggestions that you might have. And to do that, here are three-steps:

### **Engage The Underperforming Employee**

This is a basic listening skill where you lean forward, establish eye contact, you nod your head occasionally to show you're listening. Also, put your phone down, don't type on your desktop or do anything else except give him your full attention. Intermittently, you might offer what I call 'Conversational Grunts'; hmm, oh, okay, uh-huh, uh-huh which further demonstrates that you're listening, and more importantly, taking seriously what he has to say.

### **Paraphrase What The Underperforming Employee Is Saying**

Rephrase what he says he knows you're hearing what he meant you to hear. For example:

Him: " I feel like I'm really doing a good job and meeting my goals, and there're no problems."

You: "So, you feel like everything is okay."

## **Empathize With What The Underperforming Employee Is Telling You**

Empathizing is understanding how another person feels.

Empathizing is the act of paraphrasing what you think his feeling are back to him.

You: "Well, It sounds like you feel pretty good about it."

Him: "Yup, I do."

At this point, it is really tempting to shoot him down by saying something like, "Well, the fact is, that you shouldn't be feeling good at all because your work is stinks." Don't do that.

Here's where you offer your point of view in terms of what is lacking and how he might solve the problem. The reason you earned yourself a hearing was so he would be more open to your suggestions. If you've taken the time to hear him out, it's almost an obligation on his part to hear you out. This doesn't always work but it's one way to get a better handle on the problem and have him be more likely to hear what you have to say.

### **The Good News**

It's likely that when you ask the underperforming employee for his judgement on his performance, he may come right out and tell you he's underperforming and offer some ideas on how he can improve. When that happens, you're more than half way there to solving the problem.

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