

Section: PS 804-E Performance Improvement Guideline – Problem Solving Interview Appendix E

Last Revised: September 1986
Last Reviewed: September 1986

Next Review:

Your objective in the interview is to verify information you have and gather information from the employee as to the existence and cause of a performance problem. Information gathered will serve as basis for a corrective plan of action.

The interview has five steps - Purpose, Survey, Probe, Summary, Close

Purpose

Sets out the reason for the meeting and establishes an environment conducive to information exchange. The desired environment is one of rational adult to adult dialogue that is non accusatory and low in emotion. Establishing this environment is critical to effective two way information exchange. The employee may be apprehensive at meeting outset; your tone and demeanor are very instrumental in overcoming this problem. After welcoming the employee, and his union representative if present, exchanging pleasantries etc., you will state:

- Why we are here: to discuss and resolve a perceived performance problem, describe generally
- My purpose today: to verify the problems exist, define its nature and causes, and if possible, arrive at a mutually agreed upon course of action. Indicate notes will be taken but that they will be read back at meeting's end, and revised if necessary, to ensure the employee's views are correctly understood

Survey

Your objective is to verify the information you have and to obtain the employee's views as to the existence, nature, causes and resolution to the problem. After restating the problem as you understand it, you will discuss the following:

- What is occurring in terms of performance and performance deficiencies
- Where are there deficiencies occurring i.e. evidence of their occurrence
- When are they occurring in time, including frequency
- Who is responsible, for or contributing to, these deficiencies
- How might this situation be corrected – suggestions

It is critical that your focus on the employee's perspective in these areas. Do this by setting out what you believe to be the case and encourage the employee to respond. Your primary thrust should not simply be to confirm what you believe to be the case. Rather, allow the employee through his explanation and in response to your questions, to confirm or amend your understanding.

Probe

The probe is used during the survey to explore the elements in depth. This involves the use of directive and non-directive questioning techniques.

- Non-directive: Sets out the question in broad terms and does not suggest, or limit the scope of the reply desired; e.g. can you tell me about your absence last Friday?
- Directive: The question is more specific, seeks more precise information and limits scope of reply; e.g. were you at work at 3:00 p.m. on Friday?

The approach is to proceed from non-directive to increasingly more directive questions in a specific area where information is desired. You are proceeding from general responses to responses that increasingly provide more detail on a specific matter.

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Summary

Your objective is to verify, and amend if required, information obtained in the interviews. Refer to your notes and describe what has been discussed and the information advanced by the employee. Revise the latter to the employee's satisfaction so that it reflects his view.

Close

Your objective is to close the meeting in a positive fashion. State that you wish to consider the matter further after having given consideration to the information obtained in the interview. Inform him when he can expect to hear from you and that he should feel free to contact you at any time prior to that date.

The problem solving interview may involve the use of other questioning techniques, e.g. paraphrasing, feeling clarification, inviting elaboration etc. In addition, methods to deal with new and unexpected information or contradictory information are available. Your personnel advisor can assist you in these areas and in formulating your overall approach to the interview.