

## Feature

**Topic:** Dealing with employees mistakes

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A better approach to tackling non-performing employees and those who continuously make mistakes, is to understand the root cause of the problem, writes **Nivedan Prakash**

If employees make mistakes, they are normally pulled up and strict action is against them. But in some cases, they are even appreciated for at least putting in an effort. Mistakes are classified in a few ways not just right and wrong, and in case there is a lesson/improver which is implemented at work it should be ok. However, there are a few towards which there is zero tolerance. The action taken for a mistake committed by an associate is not uniform as it depends on the nature of the mistake committed.



“Normally employees are not pulled up for mistakes due to genuine reasons; however, discussions take place to avoid similar mistakes in the future. If it is evident that an employee had put in the best of his/her efforts and mistakes are accidental then they are appreciated for efforts and advised to take precautions in the future,” pointed out Ulhas Aher, HR-Head, Datacraft.

Vishal Taneja, Senior Consultant, Redileon Search Partners, opined, “Highly motivated employees are true assets for any organization. However, every organization, no matter what the industry or size of the company, also has certain number of non-performing and unmotivated employees as well. Hence, removing these employees could be the most direct and easy way of solving the problem but may have certain downsides like cost and time of training the replacement, disruption of normal workflow, severance pay, et al.”

Similarly, Patni, as an organization, try and convert mistakes to learning by providing a constructive feedback to the employee concerned. The feedback mechanism has both formal and informal means. The company is committed to the development process of the employee. However, if the mistakes are on account of skill gaps, then it is taken to the training platform and the employee concerned is re-skilled. If the mistake is on the value front then it resorts to separation and that is non-compromisable for Patni.

Echoing her views on the same, Anita Venugopal, VP-HR, SAP Labs India, asserted that as an organization, SAP Labs India actively encourages innovation and finds ways and means to make innovation a way of life at work. Mistakes are fine as long as the person is doing the right things. Mistakes can also lead to interesting inventions.

Jagat M Sarkar, Head-HR, eRevMax Technologies believes that all human beings make mistakes and it is natural. However, it is important that the same mistakes are not repeated. As a company, they have recently incorporated a new program called 'Sbaglio', to ensure that a person's mistake is not repeated, neither by that person, nor by anybody else.

For BD India, providing regular ongoing feedback is embedded in the fabric of the company. If mistakes have been made, feedback is given immediately. Whether strict action is taken

or not depends on the 'intent' behind the mistake. If it is an honest, genuine mistake which has happened for the first time, feedback is given and the associate is provided an opportunity to improve. If it is a failure of a new project or a new initiative where adequate efforts went in, then true to BD values everyone takes ownership of the mistake rather than pointing fingers at one person. The effort then is to try and understand and learn from the mistake.

Employees at Directi are provided optimum training which eliminates the scope of committing errors while performing tasks. The company's induction and training programs focus on stringent learning through mentoring and pairing initiatives.

### Non-performing employees

"There are umpteen ways and this is limited only by the employee's own creativity. An engaged employee and one who is constantly thinking of ways to do better at his job is the one most likely to come up with creative ideas"



**- Rajiv Krishnan**  
MD, DDI India

Non delivery of goal-based expectations repeated over two appraisal cycles is categorized as non-performance. Besides, non-performance is a drop in the productivity or in the performance. It is important to give feedback in a sensitive way and yet convey the message. There are cases where-in there is revolutionary change in performance just due to the 'right' feed forward mechanism of feedback used as part of coaching the associate.

"Removing non-performing employees could be the most direct and easy way of solving the problem but may have certain downsides like cost and time of training the replacement, disruption of normal workflow, severance pay, etc."



**- Vishal Taneja**  
Senior Consultant, Redileon Search Partners

There are various factors that can be attributed for non-performance. At times, it is just a misfit in the role which leads to lower productivity, or at times, there are temporary slumps in the performance curve when employees are bogged down by personal issues. Before even branding someone as a non-performer, the companies first find out if there is something that they need to change in the employees' current scenario, which will make him perform better than his current standards e.g. changing his team, manager, role, and so on. Once the root cause of the problem is identified, the organization works together with the employee to enhance productivity and ensure that they provide him all the necessary support in fulfilling his duties and responsibilities.

Amrita Basu, VP-HR, TechProcess Solutions, further added, "TechProcess is a goals-driven organization where individual performance is measured through defined metrics. Not delivering on pre-agreed goals is defined as non-performance. Cases of non-performance trigger the organizational performance management process, which entails counseling, training and reorientation. Non-performers are also checked for suitability for more compatible roles within the organization. TechProcess will use the option of termination of an employee's service only as the last resort, if none of the other options work out."

"Non-performance for us is characterized by an employee not meeting basic work objectives, despite being provided resources, guidance and opportunities to remedy the situation. In such cases, we first examine if the remedial plan is adequate and if the employee is deployed in an appropriate role. We also ensure that a fair chance and time frame is given to the employee to assimilate improvement actions and better his/her performance," said Shantanu Banerjee, Director-HR, Steria India.

Meanwhile, Surabhi Mathur Gandhi, GM of TeamLease Services, is of the view that mentoring, coaching and on the job training is provided extensively to harness capabilities and efficiencies to the fullest. This also allows slow or non-performers to emulate best practices while being guided effectively. As a dual function, this close monitoring allows focused growth while providing a holistic review of individuals' capabilities and capacities—key factors instrumental in justifying the existence of employees.

"We seek and nurture those individuals who can and want to make a difference. Non performers are defined as those employees who do not have the zeal to learn and grow. If any employee is found with a lack of interest for his/her own development, a proper coaching, mentoring and training is provided. Job rotation is also explored as an option. If this does not work he/she is relieved from the services," asserted Nikul Shah, Senior VP-Commercial and HR, Omnitech InfoSolutions.

### Finding the right solution

If employees don't perform well at work and, in these times of economic downturn, where zero-tolerance level prevail amongst the employers, the questions that arises here are that—are removing non-performing employees the only option left for organizations?

N V Rajan, Senior VP-HR, Infinite Computer Solutions is of the opinion that it is not the only solution. Employers should take a pro-active approach to improve the talent performance graph. It is quite possible that an employee might not be well suited for the specific job that he was engaged, however in the event if alternative opportunities are available and if we believe that the employee can do better in the alternate job, he must be given that opportunity.

It is important for an organization to have set process and policies in place on performance, be it non-performance or high potentials, as it gives a structure to the entire initiative and less subjective and more objective. The most important step is to identify the reasons for non-performance and the same needs to be understood and analyzed. There would be various factors or reasons why an associate is not performing. If it is found that its non-performance purely on the competence or skill level, then the associate needs to put on a performance improvement plan comprising of on-the-job mentoring and monitoring the performance, and if there are issues with the supervisor then the same needs to be addressed as well

"We strongly believe that the associates should be given a fair chance to improve and perform to their best. The reason for non performance by an individual should be assessed and all required support should be provided by the organization to the associate to improvise," commented Satyanarayana Vinjamoori, Head-HR, ADP India.

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**- Ramesh Soundararajan**  
Vice-President-HR, CA India

Adding further, A Subramaniam, Senior VP-HR of Consim Group, said, "Non-performers may be transitioned out of the organization only as a last resort. We also give them new assignments if they have matching competence before taking career decisions."

Some of the industry experts, however, believe that removal of non-performing employees is a reasonable and fair option for employers. Keeping non-performers stresses an organization and creates moral problems for the performers. They also look at the performance trends. If non-performance is an aberration, chances are given to remedy; non-performance is not to be encouraged as a habit. Sometimes, employees are assigned roles that are not well-fitted for their skills. In such cases, it is sometimes viable to transfer the employee to a different role and carefully monitor their progress.

Meanwhile, there are other viable options of dealing with such situations where employees do not perform. Like, for example, the employee's previous motivators should be identified. Determining which motivational factors are no longer present in the work profile or schedule and/or which factors no longer work as motivators. Even counseling and mentoring sessions can be a useful tool in making an employee effective. These sessions should highlight the employee's goals and the opportunities available for personal and professional growth in the future.

Iti Kumar, VP-People Development, GlobalLogic, opines that there are various ways of handling non performers, including identifying the gaps in performance early and sharing timely feedbacks, providing support to the individual from a team's perspective and giving tools to perform the task, aligning a mentor with the individual who can guide, coach and give solutions, and providing training on the areas which have performance gaps.

Non-performance could at times be due to incorrect fitment, lack of role clarity, multiple change of supervisors or the role itself. Hence, before declaring it as non-performance, FIS, as an organization, analyzes a situation. If it is due to incorrect fitment, another suitable role is offered and another chance to learn and perform is given. A situation like this is often learning for the recruitment team in the case of an external hire and line HR if it is an internal candidate through an internal job posting.

### **Promoting creativity at the workplace**

Organizations today believe in a professional yet informal work environment, culture of excellence, passion to add value, respect for the individual and creativity as the cornerstones for a healthy workforce. The employees are encouraged for periodical growth, transparent interactions with management and are given freedom to experiment ensuring no impact on deliverable results and compliance.

These days we can also see an open and inclusive organizational culture that fosters innovation and enables everyone to fulfill their true potential. Many organizations promote the policy of work-life balance, which goes a long way in enhancing employee productivity. They see to it that the work milieu is inspiring, ideative, learning, and positive. The employees are constantly encouraged to upgrade themselves and develop new skills and capabilities. Having said that, employees are provided with a collaborative work platform so that they can show creativity in their day-to-day work.

Organizations have created a variety of systems and forums to help their employees demonstrate their creative and innovative abilities at work. Employees displaying the eagerness to grow are given additional responsibilities—vertical or horizontal.

Rajiv Krishnan, MD, DDI India, opines that there are umpteen ways and this is limited only by the employee's own creativity. An engaged employee and one who is constantly thinking of ways to do better at his job is the one most likely to come up with creative ideas.

Expertus, a learning outsourcing organization, wants to provide the industry standard of 25 hours of learning per employee per year either through ILT, webinars, e-learning or material reading.

Using multi-dimensional approaches, thinking out-of-the-box in the day-to-day activities and being constantly on the lookout to add value in anything and everything that associates do are some of the ways through which day to day work can be done creatively.

So here we can say that a healthy and a nurturing work environment itself boosts creativity at work.

Rajita Singh, Head-HR, Broadridge Financial Solutions, said, "Every opinion counts in our work culture i.e. acceptance of the ideas at the first place. Whether it is accepted or rejected with logical reasons is the next step. Additionally, we also provide training like six thinking hats and lateral thinking to our associates helping them with the tools of creative thinking leading to innovation. In fact, the very basis of our successful iFIT being launched is a combination of team work and creative thinking."

"CA ITC runs an annual innovation program that challenges employees to come up with ideas in a variety of areas and formats. Additionally, the CEO of the company has formed an innovation fund whereby every employee is encouraged to submit their innovation ideas and business cases. Submissions are selected on a quarterly basis. Those chosen get to personally present their innovation idea to our CEO to compete for allocation of budget dollars from the innovation fund to develop their innovation idea," added Ramesh Soundararajan, Vice President-HR, CA India.

Companies like Himalaya Optical have a very dedicated training and development department for creating an environment for their employees to learn while at work. Some of the modules are—quality control, high-end after sales service, leadership management, on the job projects, online video conferencing for latest happenings and current updates.

Krishna Vinod, HR Manager of LSI Technologies, India is of the view that learning can take place at work or on the work. To create an environment for employees to learn at work it is important that development discussions and developmental feedback take place in a timely manner.

Development discussions help in aligning an employee's skills and interests with projects as and when the opportunities arise.

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