

TIPS FOR DEALING WITH PROBLEM EMPLOYEES

Within any VR organization, significant amount of productive time can be lost to dealing with problem employees. This means that not only has the organization lost the productivity of the problem employee but also the productivity of those needing to deal with this employee. Further, depending on the situation, the productivity of co-workers may also be impaired.

Problems with employees tend to be either performance or behavior related. For performance related problems, see the toolkit section on performance management. The tips below focus on behavior related issues.

Tips for handling such situations include:

- Begin with an assessment of your agency's internal capacity (assets/resources) to address the situation. Any individual situation may require knowledge of your collective bargaining agreement, state human resource rules and procedures, state and federal human resource laws, conflict mediation techniques, etc. If this expertise is lacking in your organization, reach out to your appropriate human resource representative and/or legal representative.
- Make the above-referenced assessment quickly and immediately reach out to help if needed. How incidents are immediately addressed can dictate the ultimate success dealing with the situation. Obtaining materials, witness statements, and other important pieces of data should be done before anything disappears and to prevent tampering with evidence. If the employee is under the influence of drugs or alcohol, those tests need to be conducted before those substances leave the employee's system.
- The worse thing to do is to try to handle complex situations yourself if you are not a human resource or legal expert. Don't be a "lone ranger". Ensure you have support for your decisions before they are challenged. Assume they will be challenged.
- Do not bury your head in the sand and assume that situations will just resolve on their own. While there are times when miracle resolutions occur, this is not the norm. Typically, situations escalate making them more difficult to resolve and making other employees wonder why management is not managing.
- When encountering problem employee situations, remember to analyze the broader situation. Are most employee situations occurring in a particular office? If so, is this a result of a gap in supervision or because the supervisor in that office is more focused than other supervisors in trying to hold employees accountability? Look for demographic or cultural undertones in staff discord. If so, what is creating this pattern? After the analysis, develop any required corrective action plans.
- Remember many employee problems are really communication problems. These communication problems can be individuals, teams or the entire agency.

- Agencies that promote good communication, proper supervision and enhanced teamwork are taking proactive steps in preventing employee problems. Taking proactive measures to prevent problems is the best policy.