**How To Address Church Staff Substandard Performance**

A church staff member’s performance is substandard when it falls below the minimum acceptable level of performance – when the employee’s results don’t meet agreed upon expectations and standards.

**Four Common Approaches That Don’t Solve The Problem**

Unfortunately, most churches approach the problem of staff substandard performance in one of four unreasonable ways:

1. Ignore It: This is by far the most frequent approach. This approach is understandable because addressing substandard performance is difficult, messy and one of the most emotionally and politically charged problems a Supervisor and Church Personnel Committee face. The problem is that, not addressing substandard performance inevitably lowers the effectiveness and efficiency of the staff member’s area of ministry and ultimately the mission and vision of the church.
2. Supervisor Support: In this approach the Supervisor covers for the subordinate and does enough of their work to meet minimal standards. The problem with this approach is that the Supervisor is taken away from his or her primary job duties and increases the risk they become a substandard performer.
3. Subordinate Support: If the substandard performer is a Supervisor, their subordinates may at times provide sufficient support to meet the minimal standards. Not only is this unfair, it can cause resentment and job dissatisfaction to the point the subordinate seeks another job.
4. Peer Support: Another common approach is for the Supervisor to assign to another peer level staff member the work of the substandard performer that is not meeting expectations. The problem with this approach is that the co-worker may become a substandard performer in their primary areas of responsibility and will eventually resent covering for the substandard performer.

None of these approaches are reasonable because they don’t solve the core problem – the substandard performer continues to perform at an unacceptable level. In fact, these approaches usually exacerbate the problem because of rising resentment, increased costs and reduced quality and quantity of work.

**Four Reasonable Substandard Performance Approaches**

1. Elevate: To elevate is to put into place a program of development that brings the staff member’s performance up to the agreed upon standards. This approach could include such things as mentoring, church site visits, conferences, books and schooling. If the training can be done economically and within a sensible time frame, this is the approach that should be considered first.
2. Relocate: Sometimes there is another job within the church that is a better fit for the substandard performer. Or, maybe it is determined a different supervisor, associates or work situation within the church would improve performance. Relocating should only be considered when another position and or situation exists within the church that the employee can handle successfully.
3. Recalibrate: At times restructuring the job description is a logical approach for retaining a substandard performer, especially in a growing church where new opportunities for ministry are being created. This approach should only be considered though when it is in the best interest of the ministry and the church.
4. Terminate: If elevating or relocating the employee or recalibrating their job description isn’t feasible or hasn’t achieved the desired results, the last reasonable approach is to terminate the employment of the substandard performer. It is a reluctant last step, but at times is the only fair and sensible solution.

These four solutions to substandard performance are the most reasonable approaches because the church no longer suffers from the effects of poor performance, coworkers don’t have to carry an additional and unfair load, and substandard performers have an opportunity to either improve their skills or find a position or job more aligned with their gifts and abilities.

**The Restoration/Termination Stair Step**

Everyone on a church staff needs to know that substandard performance will be confronted using one or more of the Four Substandard Performance Approaches, and deserves to know specifically how substandard performance will be addressed.

The Restoration/Termination Stair Step provides the Supervisor, Staff and Church Personnel Committee with a guide for implementing the Four Substandard Performance Approaches. The process is fair to both the employee and the church because clarity and agreement are stressed at each step.

The ultimate goal is that the substandard performer would be restored to an employee in good standing, one who is meeting or exceeding all performance standards. The reality though is that in some situations termination is the only logical consequence of substandard performance.

Let’s take a close look at each of the four steps.

**Step One: Clarify and Concur**

The first step in addressing the problem of substandard performance is to be clear and mutually agree upon the standards. These standards can be related to quantity, quality, cost, time, character, values, policies, goals, communication and leadership to name a few. Typically there are global standards that apply to all employees but there may be position specific standards as well.

It is not only difficult, but it is unfair to attempt to address substandard performance when the employee has not known of, or agreed to the standards and expectations of their performance.

**Step Two: Compare and Concur**

In the second step, the Supervisor and Personnel Committee must use a measurement system that compares the actual performance to the standard. This could include 360 Peer Reviews, personal observation, and surveys and assessments.

The gap between the standard and the employee’s performance is the problem that has to be addressed. The clearer the standards, the measurement system and who will be doing the measuring, the easier it is to discern and address the scope and size of the problem, or gap.

**Step Three: Correct and Concur**

Once the standards and the problem has been identified and agreed upon, the next step is to develop and agree upon action steps, or the Corrective Program, to close the gap and bring performance up to the standard.

The Corrective Program should be in writing and include specific, measurable, attainable, and relevant goals along with a specific timetable for reporting improvement that both the Supervisor and substandard performer agree to. This program might also include job or skill specific training, coaching and study.

**Step Four: Consequences and Concur**

The final step is to determine and jointly agree upon the consequences if the corrective program requirements and objectives are not met. As noted above, there are only three reasonable outcomes to continued substandard performance: Relocate to another position, Recalibrate the job description or Terminate employment.

**The Advantages Of Using The Restoration/Termination Stair Step**

1. It is fair to both the church and the employee.
2. Clarifies and codifies the process that will be followed to address substandard performance.
3. Provides the Supervisor and Personnel Committee a step by step process for dealing with the problem of substandard performance.
4. Provides the substandard performer with an understanding of the problem and the consequences.
5. Provides the substandard performer with plenty of notice and the opportunity to improve their performance.
6. Empowers the substandard performer by providing input and some control over the solution and the outcomes.
7. Provides the Supervisor and Personnel Committee clear rationale for substandard performer decisions to share with stakeholders.