

# 11 Signs of Underperformance Every Manager Should Look Out For

Spotting individual underperformance early makes improving their performance easier and quicker. If the individual is not able or willing to improve their performance, then moving them from the team earlier reduces their impact on the team overall.

Use these 11 signs of potential underperformance to spot and tackle underperformance as early as you possibly can



## Sign of underperformance

### Increased Negativity

## What to look out for

Increased negativity from a team member is a common reaction when struggling with parts of your role, projects or tasks and activities.

Increased negativity might show itself in:

1. Comments in public or private that focus on what can go wrong, what is not going to work, the risks, etc
2. Being quieter in team meetings or not as vocal generally within the team
3. Bringing up problems, but not attempting to work out solutions.
4. Being less complimentary about colleagues, or stopping praising others
5. Asking a lot more unconstructive questions or challenging colleague or manager expectations or requests
6. Not as willing to help and support team members

Being vocally and publicly negative can impact other team members motivation and energy and undermine the team dynamics. The more outspoken and obvious, the bigger the problem negative presents to the team.

## What to do next

Activities listed are completed

Positive atmosphere in the team as per team feedback

## Sign of underperformance

# Regularly Taking Longer or Staying Late to Deliver Average Work

## What to look out for

When we are not sure how to do a task or activity it takes a lot longer to complete it.

There is a big difference between taking extra time learning something new, and regularly being a lot slower than your peers to do tasks and activities.

Watch out for

1. team members repeatedly asking similar questions (repeated because they don't understand) or
2. team members repeatedly asking for help to complete a task, activity or project.

Team members regularly taking a long time on tasks or staying late to complete tasks when everyone else has left is not good for them or the team.

## What to do next

Work out if:

1. They have the will
2. They have the capability
3. They have the work ethic

To do what is being asked of them going forward with the right help. If yes, organise additional training.

## Sign of underperformance

### Lack of Motivation or Energy

#### What to look out for

Lack of motivation can be the result of lots of issues. One of those is underperformance.

It is demoralising to be behind teammates in terms of ability to do a task, activity, or job. No-one likes being last or the bottom of the performance rankings.

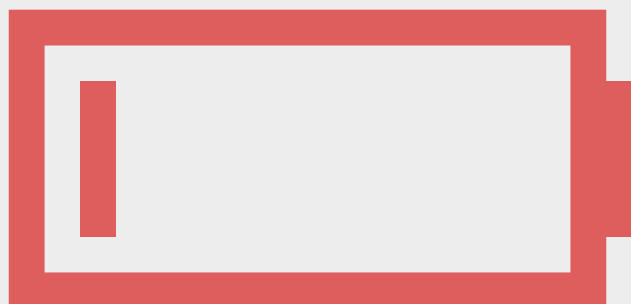
Lack of motivation or energy is a common sign of those struggling with their work or struggling being at work. It is easier to give up mentally than push yourself to learn and improve or overcome challenges faces.

Displaying a drop in motivation and low energy is a classic a cry for help from some employees.

#### What to do next

Speak to the employee and ask them what is causing their lack of motivation or low energy.

The reasons behind the lack of motivation or low energy will determine what you do next.



## Sign of underperformance

### High Stress Levels

#### What to look out for

Stress at work can have many different causes.

Conscientious employees will experience a lot of stress if they are struggling with a given task activity or project. They will not want to let you or their team members down. When you are struggling, the work takes longer, which means missing deadlines is much more likely.

High stress levels happen when something goes wrong.

High stress levels also occur when you feel the pressure to perform and know you keep falling short. You are more likely to be worried about your job security or how you are perceived by colleagues and your manager.

#### What to do next

Speak to the employee and ask them what is causing their high stress levels

The reasons behind the stress they are feeling will determine what you do next.

## Sign of underperformance

### Increased Absence

#### What to look out for

Absence is a significant problem for teams trying to reach or beat targets. The work needed to meet or beat targets is either not done or the rest of the team become overworked covering for the absence.

In my experience, underperformers are more likely to have increased absence because of higher stress levels, they find being at work harder, or there is resentment and anger towards them from team members.

Repeated absence or longer periods of absence (i.e. due to stress) can be used to try to disguise the reasons for the underperformance.

#### What to do next

Speak with the employee to find out what is causing the absence.

If the absence could be performance related, check the employee's output compared to peers.

The better your understanding, the more likely the action you take will reduce absence.

## Sign of underperformance

### Omitting Part of the Output of the Role

#### What to look out for

Sometimes employees missing parts of their role are obvious, other times this only become apparent over time.

Omitting parts of the role can also happen from no or unclear role descriptions and from being unclear when setting and maintaining expectations.

If those both have been done well, then employees not doing parts of their role stem from a number of reasons such as

1. not knowing how to do them,
2. only understanding the basics of what is needed,
3. disliking those tasks or activities,
4. rebelling or other behavioural issues

Underperformance is the consequence of missing part of the role or not doing it very well.

#### What to do next

Provide a clear up to date job description setting out all the responsibilities.

Set and maintain clear expectations.

Work out if:

1. They have the will
2. They have the capability
3. They have the work ethic

To do what is being asked of them going forward with the right help. If yes, organise additional training.

## Sign of underperformance

### Missed Deadlines

#### What to look out for

Missing deadlines repeatedly is a common sign of underperformance.

We all miss deadlines or have to negotiate new ones from time to time. This is normal.

Repeatedly missing deadlines, or missing deadlines for high value or important work can have big consequences and impacts for the team and potentially the company.

Some of the excuses I have heard are:

1. I didn't know this was so important
2. I wasn't sure when the deadline was
3. I didn't know how to do X,Y,Z
4. Something else came up with meant this work was delayed

Underperformers in my experience usually have a lot of excuses as to why it was not their fault.

#### What to do next

Understand what caused the deadlines to be missed.

If you are being provided with a list of excuses, investigate each excuse, and find out if it is valid. Go through your finding with the individual.



## Sign of underperformance

# Increased Mistakes or Rework

## What to look out for

Another issue with potentially serious consequences is repeated mistakes or the individual or team members having to do a lot of rework to rectify mistakes spotted.

Common reasons for mistakes include:

1. There was a lack of attention to detail
2. Few or no checks were done at completion stage
3. The person rushed the work or didn't have enough time to do it properly
4. Information, skills, experience or support was lacking
5. The expectations set on what was to be delivered were not clear

We all make mistake at work.

Underperformers make more mistakes than other team members, or they repeat mistakes already made.

Look out for patterns of mistakes or one person regularly making mistakes.

## What to do next

Check what is causing the mistakes to be made.

Work out if it is:

1. Environmental
2. Lack of training or support
3. The individual

Take action as appropriate

## Sign of underperformance

### Lower Levels of Output

#### What to look out for

Lower output levels compared to peers (assuming the same type of work) is a clear sign of underperformance.

Lower output means others need to pick up additional work or team targets are more likely to be missed.

Missing targets have consequences such as

1. Reduced praise and appreciation
2. Higher pressure and scrutiny
3. Lower professional standing
4. No or lower bonuses and pay rises
5. No promotions

These impact everyone in the team.

Underperformers place a significant strain on other team members and create tensions and conflict within the team.

#### What to do next

Investigate and understand what is causing the lower output levels. If it is individual underperformance then take action immediately

## Sign of underperformance

### Unhappy Customers

#### What to look out for

Common reasons customers become unhappy include:

1. What was promised is not delivered
2. What they receive is late, shoddy or does not meet their needs
3. The service provided is poor or below expectations

The work produced by underperformers is more likely to create unhappy customers for all the reasons we have been through above.

Unhappy customers will at some point take their business elsewhere, which results in reduced revenues for the business. This impacts everyone in the business.

#### What to do next

Investigate why the customer is unhappy and address the problems or the person quickly.

## Sign of underperformance

# Missed Targets or Missed Objectives

## What to look out for

Targets can be missed for a whole number of reasons. All the reasons we have been through can quickly impact what the individual and team produces resulting in

1. Falling output
2. Lower quality work
3. More mistakes, requiring additional work and time to rectify
4. Less customers
5. Reducing teamwork and effective of the team

If any individual within the team is falling behind targets or doesn't look like they can reach targets, start investigating the causes immediately.

## What to do next

Set realistic and practical targets with each team member.

Assess progress against targets at individual and team level.

Investigate what is causing any individual or the team overall to fall behind targets.