Plan for Handling Poor Performers

1. Does this person fully understand the outcomes for which s/he is responsible and/or the behaviors expected of him/her? If yes, see #2.

If no, set up a meeting to discuss clearly and directly what his/her outcomes and responsibilities are and the behaviors which are expected of him/her. See handout on clear communication for help with being clear about responsibilities.

2. Is this person aware of their poor performance? Have I met with them about it? If yes, see #3.

If no, set up regular weekly meetings with employee until performance improves (or until employee is terminated). At first meeting, describe the outcomes for which the person is responsible that they are not attaining, or the behavior that they are displaying that cannot continue (e.g. being late 3-4 days a week). Ask what their ideas are to improve the situation/behavior/outcomes. Do they need more resources or support to do their job? Do they need to set up an alternative child care arrangement, etc.? Ask for their input on how to improve the situation and be clear on the consequences of not improving the situation.

3. If the person is very aware of their poor performance and has been given multiple warnings and had multiple meetings with you about their performance, it is likely time to make a plan for their termination. See suggestions below.

If it comes time to let someone go....

IMPORTANT: This is not legal advice. You should consult your organization’s law firm or lawyer in all personnel matters.

Except in unusual circumstances, when a person is let go, it should not come as a surprise to them. They should have received plenty of feedback on their performance, such that they know it is not working.

Questions to think through if you believe it is time to let someone go:

1. Do you have the authority to fire (or are you part of a larger organization that does not grant you that authority? If so, you must consult with your supervisor on a plan of action.)

2. Do you have a pro-bono law firm you work with?

Yes - Go over the circumstances surrounding the termination with them and have them remind you of things it is OK to say and things it is not OK for you to say during the meeting surrounding the termination.

No – It would be good to try to establish a relationship with a law firm that can guide you in this and other legal matters.

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3. Do you have a personnel manual in place?

Yes – review policies around termination.
No – work with your board or parent organization to get one in place.

4. Are you an at-will employer?

Yes -- You can let employee go with no documented reason, however it is still best to review the whole situation with a lawyer.
No – Make sure you have followed the guidelines in your personnel manual about warnings, probation, etc.. and have all the necessary documentation.

On the day of the meeting:

Have a letter of termination ready, a severance check and form for terminated employee to sign, make sure and get keys and computer password. Have another person in the room with you, ideally, a human resources manager if your organization has one, or someone from your board. Be very matter-of-fact and remember that the reason that you are doing this is to make sure that your young people are well-served.