

Here's What To Do If A Top Employee Seems Stuck In A Rut



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Mar 21, 2022, 08:15am EDT



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Nobody is immune from having an “off” day at work. Everybody from entry-level employees to top executives will occasionally feel down, unmotivated or unproductive.

While a bad day or two is normal, a pattern of them isn't. When a high-performing employee seems to be in an ongoing slump, it may be cause for concern.

To help leaders identify and course-correct these slumps, 14 [Forbes Business Council](#) members advised taking the following steps when a top employee seems off their game.

1. Identify The Underlying Cause

It is important to note that this is not common. It's an uncommon situation for high-performing employees to be off their game. But, if you do happen to have an employee who seems off their game, it's important to take the time to investigate the underlying cause of the problem. The first step should be to identify what the problem is and then take steps to fix it. - [Todd Simmons, Courageous Leadership Alliance](#)

2. Have Honest Conversations And Regular Check-Ins

Leaders must have honest conversations and regular check-ins with employees to align on their workload and priorities. Use technology to your advantage for instant communication, but in-person meetings are also important when you're able to do so safely. Leadership requires active communication and effort to understand how to keep employees engaged and happy. - [Ryan Simonetti, Convene](#)

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3. Be Candid

Checking in with your employees in a candid fashion—openly explaining to them that you have seen a drop-off in performance you want to help them address—can go a long way. Sometimes an employee's performance can decline even further if they are afraid of how their manager might handle them. This lets you get ahead of that fear while also discussing a way to move forward. - [Suraj Gupta, Rogue Insight Capital Ltd.](#)

4. Define Specific Goals For Improvement

Poor performance is comparable to an infection—it needs to be treated properly to get it healed; otherwise, it will spread. Both employer and employee have to implement a decisive change and understand what the real cause of the problem is. Define the specific goals and improvements that you want to achieve and make sure you allow enough time. Everyone takes time to change or acquire new skills. - [Ildeme Mahinay Koch](#) , [DE MOI®](#) by [Demee Koch](#)

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5. Communicate

Communication is king! Talk to the person. If your star employee is off on their game, there is likely something you should know. It could be personal or professional, but until you speak with them in private, you can't help them. Let them know that you've noticed a difference. Share your expectations and ask what they need to get back on track. - [Nadir Qazi, DO, Qazi Cosmetic Clinic](#)

6. Take The C.O.A.C.H. Approach

I teach executives to C.O.A.C.H. underperforming employees. It stands for identifying the challenge, outlining the path to success, creating an action plan, articulating the consequences and holding them accountable. It's an easy framework that demystifies the partnership necessary for a manager to positively impact an employee's ongoing performance. - [Hilmon Sorey, ClozeLoop](#)

7. Diagnose The Problem Before Treating It

If an executive who has been a top performer for years starts coasting or mentally checking out, you need to diagnose the problem before treating it. Talented managers don't just look at the declining metrics and berate the employee for missing numbers. They look for the hidden reasons why this person is suddenly off their game. It might be a personal problem that you can help solve. - [Andrew Ellenberg, Rise Integrated Marketing](#)

8. Encourage Them To Take Time Off

Ask them what they need and when they tell you, follow through on what they are asking from you. I often find top performers are in a constant go mode and don't take the time they need to recharge. A simple reminder to take time off and recharge can make a major impact. I would stress the importance of doing this with all employees. Every employee deserves the same level of engagement. - [Sherry Taylor, Office Depot](#)

9. Listen With Empathy

It is important to have an honest conversation with them to see what is causing a change in behavior. All leaders must remember that employees have personal lives, and today more than ever, the line between work and personal lives is running thin with work from home. Be ready to listen empathetically and understand if the job is the issue or if they need some personal time off. - [Johan Hajji, UpperKey](#)

10. Provide The Necessary Resources

Open communication is crucial to keep high-performing employees on top of their game. Initiate a conversation to make sure you're on the same page, discover any roadblocks that are hindering performance and help them see their performance from your perspective. Then get them the resources they need—from HR help to necessary tools—so they can be successful. - [Ty Allen, SocialClimb](#)

11. Schedule A Meeting As Soon As Possible

Immediately schedule a casual talk with the employee while still wearing your leader's hat, as soon as you notice the change. The sooner it's detected, the earlier you can intervene and possibly come up with a solution. Just heeding that the employee is off their game is a huge deal already in strengthening an employee-employer relationship. Sometimes, it's not all about the money. - [Lane Kawaoka, SimplePassiveCashflow.com](#)

12. Be Compassionate

Check in with your employee in a compassionate way and let them know you've noticed they've seemed to be off their game. Ask them if they're okay and if there is anything they need to help them get back on track. Let them know that work-life balance is of paramount importance and that helping them regain that balance is your first priority. - [Zain Jaffer, Zain Ventures](#)

13. Ask About The Problem

The bow cannot always stand bent. So humans, every single one of them, will experience a low-performing stage in their lives. Talk about it. Is it the company or is it something private? In the end, the answer brings forward new solutions. - [Bram Weerts, Kea | Analyst Relations](#)

14. Determine Whether It's A Personal Slump Or Professional Slump

Recognize a personal slump from a professional slump. Personal slumps need reduced workload and open conversations so focus can be paid to well-being. Professional slumps, however, may indicate impending career change (Great Resignation, anyone?) or focus that is moving away from a current job. Act as a mentor in these situations by recognizing that growth and differentiation are a part of the process. - [Chris Gerlach, Synergy Life Science](#)

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