

Speed up slow employees

When you hire people, it's almost impossible to tell how quickly they work. A candidate might impress you as sharp and diligent, but after a few weeks on the job you might find that this employee works at a snail's pace.

A slowpoke may lack the smarts to complete a task at normal speed without making a stream of mistakes. There's also the possibility that the person plods along by choice, deliberately avoiding assignments.

In any case, don't give slow workers a free pass. Try these techniques to prod them to pick up the pace:

Assign an observer. Ask a trusted colleague to spend at least part of a day observing the slow employee. Explain to both of them that you want to learn more about how the worker manages his time. While he may resent being watched, stress that you're trying to assess his work habits and suggest improvements.

Set incremental standards. Create three sets of written performance standards. Quantify them so they're easy to measure. Example: Write "Completes weekly activity report in X minutes."

Label the three sets of standards A, B and C: A consists of stretch goals that qualify as exceptional. B describes decent but unspectacular performance. C defines minimal acceptable standards. The trick is to set high bars for all three levels so that even the C standards require a speed-up.

Handling the learning disabled

Employees with learning disabilities may have difficulty with reading, math, motor coordination or processing information. Learning disabilities differ from mental impairments or mental illness. In fact, people with learning disabilities have average or aboveaverage intelligence.

Provide patient direction so these employees can build self-esteem while developing their skills. You might also offer supervisory training on how learning disabilities can affect performance, and possible accommodation steps. Also refer employees to an employee assistance program or other counseling that specializes in diagnosing and treating learning disabilities.

Contact: U.S. Office of Disability Employment Policy, (202) 376-6200