

When an aging co-worker's performance slips



In teams, members must bring all their skills and abilities to projects. Giving less makes things harder for everyone. But what happens when a team member starts to falter and is unwilling—or unable—to improve?

That's what one reader asked recently on the [Admin Pro Forum](#):

"We have an admin on the team who is far past retirement age but shows no interest in retiring—which is great, except he's slowed down and become inefficient to the point where he may be creating more work than he's doing. He's not really eager or able to learn advanced new skills, either. Our boss is a very sympathetic person and feels stuck while he sees our productivity suffer. What would you do?" — Aaron

"This is a sensitive subject," says Managing People Better co-founder Leigh Steere. It always requires talking to someone in authority and "few co-workers relish 'ratting out' a colleague."

Here's how to approach it:

- **Show support.** Chances are he knows his performance is suffering, so there's no reason to lay blame, especially if there is an extenuating circumstance like an illness or family issue.
- **Exhibit patience.** "If the behavior happens only once, it may be worth giving the benefit of the doubt and staying silent," Steere says. Look for patterns that may be throwing your co-worker off.

Of course, if the behavior is putting safety at risk or seriously endangering a project, you should speak up sooner.

- **Document problems.** Don't assume your manager sees the problem, Steere says.

Document examples of a decline in performance, including date, time and a summary of the problem behavior.

- **Be compassionate.** When you talk to your manager or HR, present the evidence within a framework of concern, Steere says. For example, "I see a concerning situation that I don't know how to handle. My colleague, Sally, whom I really respect, is having a rough time. Over the past six weeks, she has been making more and more serious errors in her work, which is causing us to have to pick up the slack. I've documented several instances so you can see the nature of the problem."
- **Don't diagnose what you *think* the problem might be.** When talking with managers, focus on the results of the underperformance and possible solutions instead of speculating on the cause, says uniquelyHR CEO Mikaela Kiner. Attempting a diagnosis can cloud the issue and lead to incorrect assumptions and actions.

[Read the advice](#) that Aaron's fellow admins offered.