

Managing a sloppy employee

Q. I supervise an employee whose hygiene is so poor that fellow employees complain to me and, frankly, gag from the smell. Our HR director has twice asked him to do something about his hygiene. But the problem persists.

He also seems generally disorganized in his life. He always turns in sloppy trip reports that are late, and he handles money poorly. Yet he is highly competent technically at a time when such skills are critical to our company. Can you offer any suggestions?

A. First, it's important to understand why he has not responded to the HR director's warnings. Most people would shower more or otherwise make an effort to get their act together. Maybe he has a medical problem, in which case he might need specialized help. Second, you can always try physical isolation. Maybe he can work in an environment where he's not bothering co-workers. Is he a candidate for telecommuting?

Finally, perhaps you can appeal to his self-interest. What does he want out of the job? More money, a promotion, a better title/office space? Once you identify what motivates him to excel, then tell him that it's his for the taking if he can function in a more responsible, organized way. Then list specific steps he can take in that regard, such as cleaning up, handling money more responsibly, etc.