



ARE YOU A LINE MANAGER?

10 MOST POPULAR LINE MANAGER CONCERNS ANSWERED

GET IN TOUCH TO FIND OUT HOW WE CAN HELP...



01256 328428



info@realityhr.co.uk



The Manor House
Lutyens Close
Basingstoke
RG24 8AG



www.realityhr.co.uk

INTRODUCTION

As a line manager, you are essential to the running of your organisation, providing a vital link between the senior management and the teams on the ground.

Effective and empowered line managers are the key to a productive, engaged and motivated workforce. However, there may be times when you feel uncertain about how to tackle an issue in your team.

Here at Reality HR we regularly come across questions and issues around line management. We have created this guide to highlight the most common topics we deal with and hope this will provide a useful resource for you, as a line manager, in dealing with difficult issues confidently and in support of your development in the role.

If you would like more information about how we can support you with the challenges you face, please get in touch.

Sally-Ann Hall-Jones
CEO | REALITY HR

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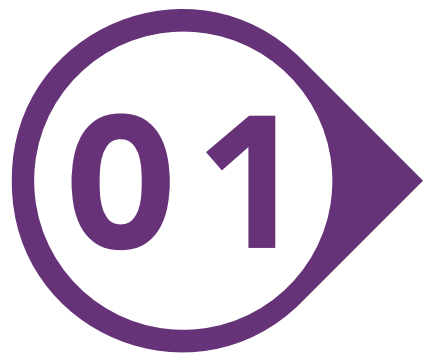
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HELP, I'M A LINE MANAGER! WHERE DO I START?

Whether you're a seasoned line manager or somebody who has been recently promoted into the role, it can be a daunting job at times.

Not only do you have your own workload to manage, you are also responsible for the productivity, mentoring and wellbeing of the people in your team.

Sometimes, high-performing employees are promoted into line manager roles by employers who assume they will be able to effectively lead a team because they are so good at their job.

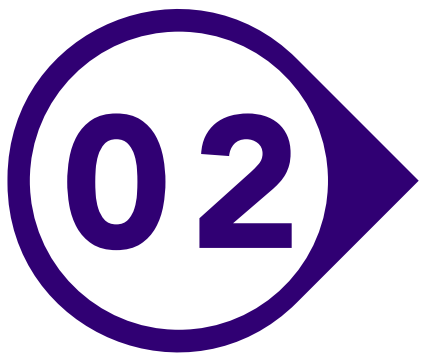
That can work, but several additional skills are required to be an effective leader of people, and not all of them can be learned on the job.

You'll feel far more confident if you receive the right training – either in the form of mentoring by a senior member of the team, or from external HR specialists. Make sure you have the right tools and you'll do a much better job. This guide will help you understand the range of responsibilities line managers have and identify any gaps where you may need training or extra support.



**TOP
TIP**

Make it your business to ensure that you have the right training and skills to be the best team leader you can be.



HOW DO I SET GOALS FOR MY TEAM?

It's impossible to hold employees to any kind of standard if they don't have a clear idea of what is required of them. In any organisation, it's vital to set expectations from the outset so that everyone understands where they need to focus and why.

What are goals for?

Setting out goals helps staff remain motivated and engaged – those who have a clear sense of direction are more likely to perform well and want to remain with your business.

How should I set them?

Make these goals SMART – Simple and Specific, Motivating and Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Trackable and with Timescales.

It is your responsibility to ensure employees have a clear set of objectives and tasks which they are working towards. Meet regularly for 1-1 reviews with all your team to discuss progress with them and keep them on the right track.

Be sure that you, as the line manager, know your organisation's rules and procedures for setting objectives and appraising performance and make sure your team know this too.



**TOP
TIP**

In a culture where everybody is clear about what is expected, and aware of the procedures in place to deal with poor conduct or performance, it's easier to act if standards do drop.

03

UNDERPERFORMANCE – IS IT THEM, OR ME?

For any line manager, no matter how well-trained or effective, there will be times when staff performance or conduct drops below what is considered acceptable.

First, make sure you can identify the issue in a way that is demonstrable or measurable – for instance, can an employee’s performance be shown to be below a set target? Is their conduct in breach of a specific company policy?

Don’t act on a vague feeling or complaint without being able to back it up with evidence.

Secondly, consider the possible cause of the issue – and be prepared to look to yourself first to ensure the fault doesn’t lie there. Have you given them the “three Ts”?

- **Target** – people need a clear, specific target to aim towards
- **Tally** – they must be able to monitor or measure their performance themselves to know how they are doing
- **Tools** – they must have the resources, ability, tools, equipment or procedures to be able to perform effectively

If any of those Ts are missing, then be sure they are in place before confronting the employee.



TOP TIP

It can be hard to hear, but sometimes poor performance can be the fault of the line manager. Look to yourself first before confronting a member of your team.

04

HOW DO I RAISE AN UNDERPERFORMANCE ISSUE WITH AN EMPLOYEE?

If there is an issue, and fault seems to lie with the employee, then it's time to take the problem up with them.

Don't be heavy-handed, especially at the beginning. Remember, it's rare that anyone goes to work with the intention of doing a bad job, so something has gone wrong somewhere along the way.

Often an informal chat over a cup of tea is the most vital step, giving both you and your team member the chance to air the issue outside of any formal process. This informal meeting, at which you can set some objectives and a date to review, may be enough to deal with the problem.

If that's not the case, then hold a second informal meeting with the same aim. If the problem persists, then it's time to turn to your in-house or external HR support for help with the next steps, which are likely to include formal meetings to reset objectives, progressing to disciplinary warnings and, ultimately, dismissal.

Cases such as these are inevitable in any organisation at some point or another. But there are steps you can take – such as giving positive feedback when it's justified, creating a healthy workplace culture, and taking a proactive approach to resolving grievances.



TOP TIP

Very few people go to work expecting to do a bad job. If something has gone wrong, try to tackle it informally before resorting to the disciplinary process.

05

HOW CAN I DELIVER NEGATIVE FEEDBACK?

The answer is – by being positive! With a constructive approach, it is possible to say what needs to be said without the need for formal letters, procedures or the involvement of HR.

Start with the facts of what was seen or heard – for example: “I noticed in the meeting today that you interrupted Sophie as she was expressing her point of view.”

Move on to the consequences of those facts on the business or team: “Sophie looked hurt when this happened and went quiet – she didn’t contribute to the meeting again, so we never got to hear her point of view.”

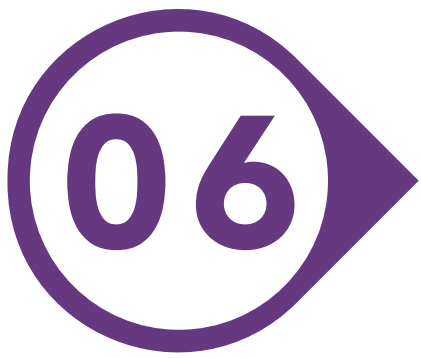
Lastly, agree with the employee what they will do differently as a result of the feedback – for example: “In the future can you try to include everyone and ensure they have the opportunity to have their say?”

Make a note of the discussion and a date to revisit the issue to see if the behaviour has changed.



TOP TIP

There may be no need for formal HR involvement – just use your communication skills to discuss your concerns, explain the impact of the issue, and agree with them what they will do differently in the future.



HOW CAN I HELP BUILD A HEALTHY CULTURE?

Mental ill-health is one of the leading causes of sickness absence in the UK, and 14.1% of workers consider themselves to have a mental health problem – that's around 1 in 7.

Around 70 million UK working days are lost to mental health issues each year, costing employers £25bn in increased staff turnover, sickness absence, and lost productivity.

There are steps line managers and leaders can take to help create a healthy work environment:

- Develop working practices, policies and procedures to protect the wellbeing of employees
- Raise awareness and understanding of mental health, and tackling stigma at work
- Educate all employees and managers about mental ill-health to normalise it and ensure it is viewed like any other kind of illness
- Ensure there is appropriate support in place for any individuals experiencing mental ill-health at work
- Make budgets available for health initiatives
- Provide line manager/employee/Mental Health First Aid training as appropriate
- Encourage staff to talk to each other and take lunch breaks with their colleagues
- Encourage them to unplug from technology out of hours and when they are on holiday – perhaps by having others in the team cover their emails

Our guide to Wellness Action Plans can help you get the most from your teams by supporting their workplace wellbeing. Download now from our website



**TOP
TIP**

Good mental health at work and good management go hand in hand. There is strong evidence that workplaces with high levels of mental wellbeing are more productive.



WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF MENTAL ILL-HEALTH?

As with many health problems, spotting the signs of mental ill-health and distress early can help deal with it more effectively. Get to know your teams well and you will be able to notice when they are behaving differently.

Remember, with mental ill-health it is the change in a person's behaviour that should be of concern – not the behaviour itself. Learn to spot when someone "isn't themselves" and take action.

Remember that it is often difficult to spot these signs in ourselves if we are the one affected.

Changes in behaviour to watch out for include:

Low motivation, irritability / mood swings, unkempt appearance, absence/poor timekeeping, excessive tiredness, being easily distracted, withdrawn & uncharacteristically quiet, slow decision making, poor performance, outbursts of anger or emotion, uncharacteristic mistakes.

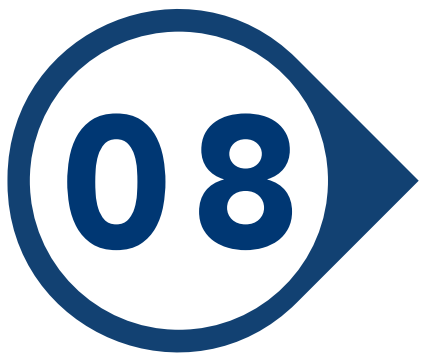
If you spot a problem don't ignore it. Find time to have an informal chat – ideally away from the day-to-day work environment in a place they feel comfortable in. Listen, but don't try to diagnose or treat them.

Point them in the direction of professionals who can help – the in-house HR team or external support, their GP and organisations such as MIND and The Samaritans if appropriate. Often just letting them know you understand and are supportive can be a big help.



**TOP
TIP**

Mental health problems can have a lot of different symptoms and signs. We may find these hard to see in ourselves but often they are easier to spot in our team members.



HOW SHOULD I DEAL WITH A GRIEVANCE?

A grievance is any concern, problem or complaint raised by an employee. It could be about any one of a range of issues – the employee's work or the conditions they work in, their pay and benefits, hours, health and safety, working relationships or their general treatment at work.

Often these moans and groans are kept under the surface, but if they are not seen and dealt with then they can come out into the open as a formal grievance.

As a line manager, it's important to develop the skill to spot these issues:

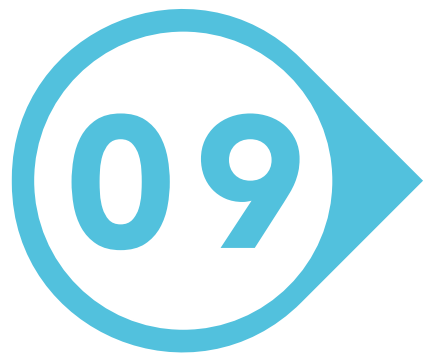
- Listen – for grumbles, complaints, concerns.
- Look out for changes in behaviour, or increased absence.
- Ask open questions to determine the cause.
- Talk to the relevant people to resolve.

Having regular 1-1 get-togethers or appraisal-type meetings, open communication and an approachable manner should avoid too many grievances.



**TOP
TIP**

If you become aware of a grievance, see this as a positive - as an opportunity to resolve the problem. It's better to know about it than to leave it festering away where it may affect other employees.



HOW SHOULD I DEAL WITH EMPLOYEE ABSENCE?

Unexpected absences can have a significant impact on a business and affect employee morale, workload and productivity. At its worst, absence, particularly if it is a regular or prolonged occurrence, can make it extremely difficult to run a team effectively.

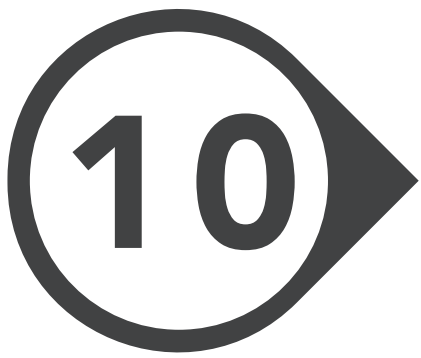
However, with some simple measures in place, absenteeism can be significantly reduced, and line managers have a key role to play here.

- Start by assuming the absence is genuine – assuming otherwise can get everyone off on the wrong footing and lead to resentment. Remember that there may be an underlying physical or mental health issue.
- Talk to the employee – even if they are on a prolonged absence. It may help you get a clearer understanding of their situation and helps them feel they are still part of the team.
- When they come back to work, conduct a return to work interview. Welcome them back, find out why they were away and check if they are well enough to be back at work.
- Have an absence policy – and make sure everyone is aware of it. The policy should cover everything from how the employee notifies you of absence to sick pay arrangements and when they are required to supply a doctor's note.



TOP TIP

In the worst cases of prolonged, unauthorised absence, a consequence may be dismissal – but line managers should ensure they carry out a proper investigation before making threats or jumping to conclusions.



HOW SHOULD I DEAL WITH MISCONDUCT?

Misconduct can cover a multitude of behaviour including persistent bad timekeeping, unauthorised absence, repeated errors, damage to company property, inappropriate use of the internet and abusive behaviour. Your company should have clear policies identifying what qualifies as misconduct and how it should be dealt with.

Deciding when an issue is serious enough to warrant a disciplinary investigation is an important part of a manager's role. Your company should have a robust disciplinary policy which gives you a clear framework to follow, but you can use other managers and/or HR experts to help.

If you need to move into a formal disciplinary process, then you must adhere to the ACAS code which sets out the gold standard for how issues must be handled fairly, promptly and consistently and be properly investigated to establish the facts.

Employees must be kept informed at all stages of the process, be allowed to put their case, have the right to be accompanied during the process and be given the option to appeal.

If these procedures are not followed, a subsequent tribunal could find that the employee was unfairly dismissed even if the outcome was the "right one". Tread carefully and take advice from an HR professional before going ahead with any formal process.



TOP TIP

Dealing with misconduct can be one of the most difficult tasks a line manager faces. Seek expert advice from an HR professional to ensure the correct procedures are followed – minimising the risk of a costly tribunal outcome further down the line.

CONTACT US TODAY

We hope you have found this guide useful. If you would like further advice on how to deal with any HR issue faced in a line manager role we are here to help.



www.realityhr.co.uk



The Manor House | Lutyens Close
Basingstoke | RG24 8AG

Third Floor | 207 Regent Street
London | W1B 3HH



info@realityhr.co.uk



44 (0)1256 328428



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