

People & Culture Leader Guide – Improving Performance Plans

What is an IPP?

Improving Performance Plans (IPPs) are a formal performance management and support tool. IPP's provide an opportunity to improve performance while holding an individual accountable for past and present performance.

IPP's aim to:

- Articulate performance concerns and requirements to improve;
- Document the support and training to be provided for the employee;
- Allow the leader and the employee to work together to achieve the desired performance
- Regularly review and assess progress in performance.

Hot Tip: *IPP's are used to support "underperformance" and are not an effective tool to address "misconduct". What's the difference? Unsatisfactory performance is a failure to meet the standards of work or behaviour expected in a position. Misconduct is when an employee fails to comply with the "rules", policies, or procedures. Misconduct is unacceptable conduct that must cease immediately.*

When to use an IPP

Keeping communication channels open and providing feedback regularly and in real time is a good way to correct performance early, however sometimes a more formal tool is required to address concerns. IPPs may be implemented following conversations in which the leader provides ongoing feedback to an employee and the employee has had the opportunity to improve with additional training or supports. If the leader has not seen the desired level of improvement in the employee's performance, then an IPP may be an effective tool.

This tool may be used to address an inability to meet specific targets, as well key performance tasks. IPPs may also be implemented as part of a formal outcome, where matters discussed have identified that further training and development is required to improve performance.

The IPP should specify:

- Areas for improvement i.e., the performance concerns to be improved upon
- Expected standard of performance
- The key steps required to be completed by the employee to achieve the expected standard
- The key steps required of the leader to support the employee to achieve the expected standard
- How performance and improvement will be measured during the IPP i.e., how will the employee demonstrate that they have improved?
- The timeframe required for improvement to be demonstrated by the Employee, including when progress reviews will be conducted

Hot Tip: *IPPs are not a static or unchangeable document, a leader can work on the contents with the employee. For example, if an individual identifies a support that may be beneficial and this is something a leader can provide, it should be added to the IPP.*

How to create an IPP

- Obtain an IPP template. This can be found on the Intranet's Document Management system. QF 5249.04 *Improving Performance Plan*.
- Develop an understanding as to why the underperformance is occurring. When creating the IPP you should consider:
 - Did the employee receive appropriate training?
 - Does the employee understand the expectations of the role?
 - Are there roadblocks in the way?
- Complete the template, using language that is positive and above the line.
- Ensure the targets are 'SMART' (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time bound) and articulate the employee's current and expected performance.
- Clearly describe the support that you will provide the employee during this time to achieve the requirements of the role.
- Send the draft IPP to your People Experience Advisor for review and feedback before implementing.

Introduce the IPP and explain the process

Talk to your employee about the IPP and ensure that you:

- Explain its purpose - *"The purpose of today's meeting is to discuss the expectations of the role and your performance to date" "I want to support your success in the role and make sure you have everything you need to reach where you need to be."* You may also wish to refer to the Courageous Conversations Leader Guide for further tips as to how you to have this conversation.
 - Open the conversation by asking the employee some exploratory questions to determine their level of awareness as to how they are performing.
 - Try to gain an understanding as to why the underperformance may be occurring. It is critical to allow for an open dialogue and feedback from the employee. This will help determine whether the employee has been provided with all the tools and resources necessary for them to be successful and what training/knowledge gaps need to be addressed.
- Advise the employee you have developed an IPP which details the expected standards of performance moving forward.
- Explain that the IPP is a tool that has been designed to support the employee to reach the required performance level.
- Read through the IPP and seek feedback from the employee – do they agree with the targets/concerns, if so why/why not?
- Be specific when reading through the key themes / performance matters, explain the concerns and cite examples.
- Define in detail what the expected standard of performance they need to achieve is and how they can demonstrate this. Examples allow the employee to clearly understand as to specifically where the employee needs to improve.
- Explain how the leader will support them to improve – what sort of training and support will be provided.
- Define when progress will be reviewed and when you will meet to discuss. *eg weekly for 8 weeks.*

Hot Tip: Make sure you refer to the template to ensure you cover all the information.

Where an employee's performance is suffering due to the employee's personal circumstances, please discuss this with them to determine if there are different supports that could be offered or if allowances can be made for the employee *eg different working hours*. Also remind them of our confidential Employee Assistance Program (EAP) through Benestar - 1300 360 364. You may also like to reach out to People Experience for support.

From there, recap the key information in an email to the employee and send a copy of the IPP for signing. Send your People Experience Advisor the signed copy of the IPP to save to file.

Book in a regular meeting in line with the timeframes articulated in the IPP.

How to conduct an IPP review meeting

Within each meeting, leaders should be discussing the employee's progress towards the desired performance level and the effectiveness of the supports being implemented.

The IPP meetings should either acknowledge the employee's improved performance, and where performance is not improved as expected, inform the employee of this, and provide an opportunity to address their performance within the remainder of the review period. Be sure to celebrate success where warranted.

Prepare for the conversation

- Explain the purpose of the IPP - *"The IPP has been designed to articulate where your performance needs to improve and how I can support your success in the role. I want to ensure you are meeting the expectations of your role."*

Work through the activities detailed in the plan:

- Ask open questions to ensure the employee understands what they have learnt in the activity. Review examples of times where the employee has demonstrated that their performance has improved, and areas where they can work on. Be clear and articulate as to the examples.
- If you feel the employee is still not confident in their understanding, review the activity together.
- Provide feedback to the employee and specify the support and resources available to them
- Seek feedback from the employee about the effectiveness of the support and resources available

Finalising the IPP

At the end of the IPP period, a leader must close the IPP with a final assessment of performance under the plan.

If performance has improved to the required level over the period, the leader should acknowledge the change in performance and confirm the closure of the IPP in writing. Don't forget to thank your employee for participating and celebrate the improvement of their performance with them.

It is expected that continued support will be provided to the employee to improve their standard work practices including regular follow-up and coaching meetings.

If, however, the employee's performance has not improved to the required level over the review period, the leader, in consultation with People Experience, depending on the circumstances may consider formal disciplinary action or an extended period on the IPP.

Tips for success

- When you are introducing the IPP with your employee try to identify why's it's important for them, make it a positive outcome i.e., we are working towards helping you plan your day so that you have the structure you need to confidentially do your role
- Be Specific: Make sure that for examples of the performance/behaviour that requires improvement you use a recent, relevant, and detailed example.
- Describe in as much detail as possible the expected standard of performance and behaviour
- Consistently ask questions and seek to understand if learning has occurred and if you can provide more meaningful support.
- Provide relevant scenarios for employees to demonstrate they know what they need to do going forward
- Set clear expectations for improvement at the end of each meeting *i.e., by the next time we meet I would like you to have worked on implementing what was discussed today and I will expect that you will be able to tell me what changes you have made and how they worked for you*
- Plan informal check-ins and review points outside of your IPP meetings.
- If the IPP is not helping the employee to improve, review what you are doing, work together with the employee to determine why, and decide whether you may need to build their capacity using different tools. You could consider different methods of developing the relevant skill or behaviour for the employee.

Hot Tip: Remember- don't just run through the concerns and ask the employee to sign. This should be a two-way conversation, with input from the employee throughout.