

## How to deal with 'problem' workers

Most managers have a few "problem" employees. These employees may not work to their full potential, or they may be too cautious or too slow. As a manager, don't give up on them. Their problems may be easily solved. Here are three tactics to use when faced with this situation:

1. **Stack the deck in their favor.** Many "unproductive" employees simply lack self-confidence. They don't try hard because they're afraid to fail. Assign these employees a project with which you *know* they'll have success. Then assign another. And so on. After each success, offer praise and recognition. Build confidence project by project, until they're ready to take on harder challenges.
2. **Find out if they're afraid of being promoted.** This happens more than you think. Employees don't perform as well as they can because they don't want to move

up—they're afraid of more responsibility and commitment, or they don't want to manage others. These people are to be *treasured*. Expand their responsibilities within their area of expertise. Let them know that you like them where they're at—but you want them to be the best that they can be within their comfort zone.

3. **Separate the behavior from the employee.** Ask yourself: Has the employee always acted this way, or is the behavior something new? If the behavior is not consistent with what you know about the employee, then start looking for deeper reasons. There might be problems at home; maybe depression has set in; it could even be a substance abuse problem. By not performing, they could be sending out a cry for help. Be there for them now, and they'll be there for you later.