

Introductory folder for managers

The good interview in difficult situations

Introduction

As a manager, you are responsible for conducting various types of interviews with employees. Some interviews are more difficult than others. To help you plan and conduct a good interview on a difficult subject, we have devised three booklets as a supplement to this introductory folder:

1. The good interview in connection with absence due to illness
2. The good interview in connection with symptoms of stress
3. The good interview in connection with senior agreements and retirement

This folder describes the general considerations associated with employee interviews, while the three theme booklets describe the specific points to be aware of, and make specific suggestions as to how you can tackle the interview.

It is important not to postpone interviews relating to critical matters, as doing so often makes the issues more difficult to solve. Prompt action in addressing the problems can also signal that you as a manager are focused on promoting well-being and solutions that ensure a good working environment.

As a manager it is your job to clarify whether your employees thrive and perform within the existing framework and budget. As a manager, you have a:

- **Managerial right**, which gives you the right to manage and delegate the work within the scope of the assigned resources and a
- **Managerial obligation**, requiring you to clarify any work-related problems that may lead to illness, stress or underperformance.

If you do not act swiftly, you may be accused of management failure, as you failed to solve or failed to attempt to solve the unsatisfactory conditions in time.

Preparation before the interview

There will always be something at stake for the employee, when you as the manager invite the employee to an interview. Even if the interview is of a more preventive nature or arises out of a concern for the employee, it is your responsibility to manage and conduct the interview in the best way possible. This requires careful preparation, both in terms of the practical framework surrounding the interview and considerations about the actual interview itself. The following pages provide guidelines on how to conduct the well-prepared interview.

Below you will find a series of questions to consider and answer before conducting an interview.

Reflections prior to the interview—what is the status/the situation right now?

- Why is the interview necessary?
- What do you want to achieve with the interview?
- How would you characterize the relationship and trust between you and the employee?
- Is the situation/problem affecting the employee's performance?
- Is the situation/problem affecting the employee's health?
- Is the situation/problem having a negative influence on the workplace in general?
- How is it affecting colleagues and the group?

- Do you have any facts to support your position? What observations have you made?
- What have you heard? What are the facts—and what is mere speculation?

Preparation and documentation log book. Make a note of your experiences and observations, including:

- Changes in behaviour
- What is no longer working which was working before?
- Your colleagues' reactions?

Reflections on the actual interview—what needs to be done in the future?

- What is the specific outcome of the interview?
- Do you know the employee very well/well/not very well?
- What should specifically be addressed at the interview? (We refer also to the 3 theme booklets for inspiration)
- What is it like to be the employee? Put yourself in his/her place.
- How can you help?
- What is the next step?
- Timetable? When will you schedule a further talk?
- Think about how you can accord equal talking time. How can you help the employee to open up?
- Remember to listen and to give the employee time to think and express himself/herself.
- Read about absence due to sickness, stress, or other policies and options on DTU Inside.

- Think carefully about how much time you need to allocate for the interview.
- Involve your HR partner in your preparation.

The next step is to invite the employee for the actual interview, and here, you may find a checklist useful:

Ground rules:

- Mutual respect, openness, and honesty.
- Confidential interview involving the participants unless otherwise agreed

When and how will you invite the employee for an interview?

- Invite the employee orally/in person at least one day before the interview. Are there any others who need to participate? An observer/a union representative?
- Clarify whether the interview is of a disciplinary or a 'concern for the employee' nature. A disciplinary meeting may have consequences for the employee's employment in the form of a warning, dismissal etc.
- Explain or describe clearly what you want to talk about. For example, the interview may focus on well-being, a senior interview or absence due to illness.
- Allocate enough time, e.g. 1 hour meeting + ½ hour buffer, so that you do not need to rush off to a new appointment.
- Book a room. The venue should be a quiet room where you are sure not to be disturbed during the interview process.

Content of a written interview notification:

- Topic
- Brief description of the aim of the interview
- Duration, time, place
- Any other participants

During the interview

The good interview places both personal and managerial demands on you. In the course of the interview, you must exhibit:

- **Attentiveness**—be fully present, maintain focus (relevant/irrelevant) and an overview of the situation.
- **A sense of perspective and inclusiveness**—be willing to listen and return to the heart of the problem. Acknowledge that you and the employee can have differing views on (solving) the problem. The employee does not have to agree with you. It may be a necessary management decision.
- **Curiosity**—show interest and acknowledge the other person’s perspective. Acknowledge the employee’s strengths and resources, and think about how these can help to resolve a problem in a constructive manner. Look for alternative angles.
- **Patience**—provide space for reflection and alternative angles in the interview. Keep the long-term perspective in mind. Believe that things can improve.

Reflections on how the interview is progressing also form part of a thorough preparation process and can help prepare you for possible reactions—and how to handle these reactions, whether they be your

own or those of the employee.

Reflections on the actual interview

- What will be the biggest challenge in the interview?
- Is the relationship between you and the employee part of the problem?
- How does it affect you?
- Does the interview situation trigger any feelings in you?
- What is it like to be the employee?
- What have you learned from other interviews?—What happened? What did you do?
- How do you think the employee will react? And how will you handle it?
- Acknowledge the employee’s feelings.
- How will you react if the employee is upset, cries, gets angry? And how will you handle it?
- Assess the need for a follow-up interview.

If something unexpected occurs

- Be prepared for something unexpected to happen. Suggest a ‘time-out’ where the employee/you can take a break. If you want, you can use the time to consult with a fellow manager or HR partner.
- Describe what is happening, e.g.: “I’ve heard what you just said about.....” New information/perspectives present themselves. I would like time to think about this. What do you say to stopping here and meeting again in a few days?

The interview:

- Be clear and unambiguous in your choice of words
- Be aware of your own body language
- Be receptive and stay focused
- Be prepared for an unforeseen situation
- Remember pen and paper

After the interview

- After the interview, you need to write a summary of the meeting for your own use. This can be done on the basis of the notes you have made during the interview and your own reflections. Clarify with the employee whether the summary is to be handed over to the employee and kept in the employee's personnel folder.
- Be aware that the employee may have questions following the interview.
- Keep any promises you have made to the employee.
- If you have agreed a follow-up meeting, allow adequate notice and prepare just as thoroughly as you did for the first interview.

After the interview:

- Summary of the interview
- Follow-up—agreements must be complied with