# Problem Solver

## "A member of my team has personal issues and it's affecting their productivity. How do I respond to this sympathetically?"

### The recruiter...

**James Hartshorn**
Head of Search,
Barclay Meade
Executive Search

I presume you have noticed that your staff member is having personal problems, or you have been told this by another member of staff, but chances are you will have seen for yourself that they are becoming less engaged with work, or perhaps are no longer chatty and are looking glum?

Noticing behavioural shifts in the office environment is so important when looking for signs of troubled staff and an unhappy team. However, you can't push them to talk to you about what might be going on outside work. You will need to wait for them to flag a problem with you, or sit down with them on a work matter with the hope that they will volunteer the information. Once you have a clearer picture about what is affecting their mood at work, act quickly with supportive measures, whether that's time off, addressing resourcing, or getting them specialist advice.

If you act quickly to ensure you are helping where you can you will make it easier for other members of staff to feel they are able to communicate with you. Many of the issues large corporates have with their staff is where employees don't feel able to talk with their managers to explain any challenges which might be affecting their work. Your primary thought should be to support the individual, and that's all you can do.

### The coach...

**Dr Anton Franckeiss**
Practice Director,
ASK Europe plc

DO address the issue. Have a forward-looking conversation that works towards two equally important outcomes: helping the employee feel supported, and helping the company get the required work or effort from them.

DO NOT tell the employee to leave their personal problems at the door and get on with it. That will not foster productivity - and it won't make the problems go away either.

DO sit down with the employee to discuss and understand the problem. Resist the temptation to solve the problem at this stage, instead, listen to it. Agree that, while they are at work, you require their full commitment to the role. Following this, the approach to supporting the employee should vary depending on the problem. Can anything be done to help them overcome it? Is the problem serious enough, and therefore so much of a distraction that they would be better off taking some time out of work (paid or unpaid, depending on company policy) in order to overcome it? If they need time to attend appointments or meetings, or someone to speak to, it is important to allow them that. They are more likely to feel supported by the company as a consequence, and be more willing to put their personal issues to one side as much as they can and concentrate on getting their work done.

DO speak to your HR Business Partner if you are in any doubt about how to conduct the conversation or about what support you can offer.

### The mediator...

**Alex Efthymiades**
Director,
Consensio Partners

This is an issue that a lot of managers have to deal with on an ongoing basis. The key here is to communicate openly and honestly with your employee. Rather than ignoring the issue, it needs to be addressed with empathy in a private and confidential setting where both you and your employee feel comfortable speaking about it.

Ask your employee how they are and allow them to tell you what is going on for them personally, if they are comfortable disclosing this. Listen to them in a non-judgemental way and give them your full attention. It is important for your employee to know that you care about their wellbeing and they may welcome the opportunity to speak with you about what is going on for them.

Remember that it is acceptable for you to tell your employee that you have noticed a drop in their productivity. Allow them to respond to this. They may not be aware that you noticed, they may not be aware that their productivity has been affected, or they may have wanted to address this with you anyway.

Ask the employee what you and/or the team can do to support them, making it clear that you are there to help and that the issue relating to productivity needs to be resolved. Rather than imposing a solution on your employee, ask them what they can do to ensure that they are able to work effectively and productively as part of the team.