

Housecalls at Work

Answers from Dr. Insite

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Dr. Insite addresses people-related issues in nonprofit organizations. For individual answers to your workplace issues, please email your questions to DrInsite@coreinsites.com. All responses will be handled confidentially.

Dear Dr. Insite:

About a year ago I hired a staff person with the intention of her eventually moving up in the organization and taking on more responsibility to help me. As it has turned out, I have continued to spend more and more of my time helping her! She is a very nice person and I really thought that she had the capacity to handle the work. However, she seems to lack the confidence to make decisions and to follow through without my guidance and approval. I have tried to be supportive and create systems for her to be more independent, but nothing has seemed to help. I am now totally frustrated. Do you have any suggestions?

Dear Totally Frustrated:

When an employee is not performing up to par, you must evaluate the cause of the deficiency. If you believe that she does not have sufficient decision-making skills, then formal training may be the answer. But, if you believe she has the skills to do the job, then the situation is more complex. You must determine whether or not you consciously support her when she does make independent decisions. If you do not, her fear of making a mistake may be deterring her from performing effectively. Or,

are there other obstacles that keep her from doing her work? For example, does she understand her job description and her area of responsibility and authority? To answer these questions will require a serious dialogue. If there are no other obstacles preventing her from acting independently, then she is not the right person for the job. When hiring people, it is essential to look not only for a particular knowledge and skill base but also for personal attributes. If she does not have the personal attributes that are needed for the job and your organization, then you have an important decision to make because personal attributes do not easily change. In another job and in a different organization, she could be quite effective. Keeping people who are not right for the work is not fair for them or the organization. Decide where the deficiency lies and make the decision about how to deal with it as quickly as possible.

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