**Dealing with Slackers**

Tip Sheet #8 from *Doing the Right Things Right* by Laura Stack

Sometimes setting a motivational fire within the team can be useful if it jolts people out of complacency—or sheer lazi­ness—and gets them back to work. Since teamwork rules in the business environment, having team members who don't shoulder their share of the load can jam the work process gears, bringing productivity to a halt. Not only do slackers slow team efficiency, their attitude may infect others.

Don't automatically assume your slackers realize what's happening. Their poor performance may not be deliberate. They may be so worried about something at home they can't do a good job at work. Possibly, they lack the right training to do as well as they should. Perhaps they're over­whelmed, not a good fit for their jobs, or bored. Maybe they don't recognize their own incompetence. So before lowering the boom, start with these corrective actions:

1. **Be Honest with Them.** Alert them to your concerns, pointing out specific examples. Ask, "Is there something going on I should know about?" This may be all you need to do to snap them out of whatever's holding them back. It may be a difficult conversation, especially if you haven't already made an effort to get to know the team member. They might not be willing to open up to you, but try anyway. Once you've pinpointed the problem, work on it. If they don't understand the requirements of the workplace, teach them what they need to know about the organization, the team, and the goals everyone needs to achieve. Provide the training they need. Pair them with a mentor.
2. **Be prepared for slackers** who know exactly what they're doing. They may have deliberately pushed the edges of the envelope to see what they could get away with, or may be actively hostile. If so, move to the next step.
3. **Put Them On Notice.** How you put an underperformer on notice depends on the cause of the problem. If some­thing in their life is distracting them, offer potential solutions. But unless it's a matter of life and death, insist they find a way to work it out so they can do the minimum requirements of their job. If they can't, or it *does* involve a matter of life and death, suggest they take time off to deal with it. You can replace them with temp workers until they feel ready to return. Human resources may need to be involved here to navigate any issues of employee and employer rights. If the unproductive employees behave in hostile, demand­ing, misguided, or lazy ways, don't play the game. Appraise them carefully, document the corrective action, and give them milestones they have to meet to get back on track and off probation.
4. **Motivate Them.** Once you've put underperformers on notice, don't disappear until reassessment time. Keep an eye on them and find ways to motivate them to do a bet­ter job. Make sure they understand what their job entails and why it's important in both team and organizational contexts. Try small rewards for successful completion of milestone tasks. It could even be something as minor as a certificate of achievement or a Star­bucks gift card with a handwritten note—whatever's in your power to give. If nothing else works, it's time for:
5. **The Nuclear Option.** If it's not working out, invite underperformers to explore their talents elsewhere. Jack Welch, former CEO of GE, famously fired the bottom 10 percent of performers in his company every year. He received a lot of criticism for it, but no one can deny that GE thrived under his guidance.

**Enough's Enough**

Slackers are productivity vampires, slowly draining your team of life. The worst of them blame others for their faults, express a toxic attitude, and deliberately stir up trouble.

Respond to them immediately by putting them on notice. Find ways to engage and motivate them where possible—and the sooner the better. If things don't clear up relatively quickly, show them the door, for your team's sake.

Laura Stack, MBA, CSP, CPAE, aka The Productivity Pro®, gives speeches and seminars on sales and leadership productivity. For over 25 years, she’s worked with Fortune 1000 clients to reduce inefficiencies, execute more quickly, improve output, and increase profitability. Laura is the author of seven books, including *Doing the Right Things Right: How the Effective Executive Spends Time*. See [www.3TLeadership.com](http://www.3TLeadership.com).