

Transcript: Alan O'Connor, Manager

Alan O'Connor dreads this time of year. It is his job to conduct performance interviews with the people who work directly under his supervision and he has always felt inadequate for this task. He tries to be honest with his employees about what they need to improve, but usually the employees seem to resent his honesty instead of appreciating his efforts to help them. He also feels very awkward when employees bring up personal issues and does not feel it is his place to deal with those. O'Connor remembers an interview from a few years ago that went badly. After greeting Gretchen Bennett, he had focused on a problem that was hindering her progress.

Alan: "Uh, Gretchen, your work pace is too slow. You've got to turn the work around more quickly so that you don't slow the rest of the team down."

Gretchen: "I take the time it takes because I want to do it right. You know I could flip stuff out really fast if that's what you want, but it's not going to be top quality."

Alan: "Ah, look. I don't want to lose you, but you've got to work more quickly."

Gretchen: "So you're threatening my job?"

Bennett left the company two months later and O'Connor felt partly responsible.

He recalls another performance interview that also turned sour. In this one, he had tried to start the discussion less bluntly.

Alan: "How do you feel about your work over the last six months since we last reviewed it?"

Male Employee: "I guess I'm doing ok. Ah, I'm not sure what you're after here."

Alan: "Well, I'd like to know your own appraisal before we talk about my perceptions of your work."

Male Employee: "Like I said, I guess I've done pretty good work."

Alan: "You've missed a lot of days and you're often late getting in."

Male Employee: "Well, there have been some family issues. My son developed a serious medical condition and we had to go through testing with several doctors and then some treatments. It took a lot of time."

Alan: "Look, I don't want to get into your family issues. Can we just focus on the work for now? Ok? I need to know that you're not going to be absent much more from now on and that you can be here on time."

Male Employee: "Not if my son needs help. I mean, he comes first. I'm sure you can understand that, but when I'm here I do my best and sometimes I stay late if I had to come in late."

This interview also ended tensely. O'Connor is not sure what he is doing wrong. He is even less sure that he can conduct interviews that are productive and motivating to employees.