



# Tough Situations

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## **DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY: TOUGH**

### **SITUATION:**

You supervise an employee who, though he seems to always be busy, is rarely able to meet the required deadlines for completing his work.

### **YOUR MISSION:**

Improve his/her ability to meet deadlines.

### **WHAT YOU SHOULD SAY OR DO:**

“Tell me how you manage the deadlines you have to meet. Show me what methods or tools you use to make sure you meet those deadlines.”

Special Note: You should expect to have him/her actually show you *how* he/she performs this task. Focus your interest on the task of making sure they meet deadlines, not the product or work they perform to produce whatever they are required to produce (report, document, schedule, any product). You should expect to see something like a notebook, a computer-aided reminder listing, a calendar with items written on it, a white board (dry-erase) on his/her office wall, or something like this that he/she uses to record deadlines. If he/she cannot show you anything like this, it's a good indicator that he/she is relying too heavily on memory alone to keep track of deadlines. If you use any of the above tools, show him/her how you use it. If he/she shows you anything like a notebook or anything like it, pay attention to the *how* of its use. Just because he/she has a notebook or other tool, it doesn't mean he/she is using it. Ask him/her to show you, in specific ways, how he/she uses it:

“Walk me through how you use this. Where do you use it?”

If you're not convinced that they have a technique or tool that works for them, consider using the Deadline Tracker tool below.

"I use a *Deadline Tracker* to keep track of all my deadlines. Here's an example of my deadline tracker:" (See Table 1) ([Download a printable blank Deadline Tracker here.](#))

Chart 1

This Week:						
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
		Turn in next week's production schedule.	Distribute meeting agenda to attendees.			

Chart 2

Next Week:						
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Turn in payroll report	Complete next month's production schedule			Submit quarterly report to regional office.		

Chart 3

2-4 Weeks Out:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Produce logistical support plan</li> <li>➤ Conduct supervisor training program</li> <li>➤ Submit budget for next fiscal year</li> </ul>

“I use three charts for the deadlines that I have to meet that aren’t recurring deadlines. For example, I don’t write down deadlines like the weekly meetings that I attend. I know them and don’t have to remind myself about them. I use the charts to list only those deadlines that are unusual, ones I need to remind myself about. The rule I go by is that if someone else is depending on something I am responsible for I want to make sure that I deliver it. People depend on me to be able to do their jobs and, in fact, these things are important for the company to be able to run properly. Every day, the first thing I do is look at all three charts to make sure I’m aware of the deadlines I have to meet. Before I go home every day, I look at the charts again to make sure I’ve done anything I need to do that relates to one of my deadlines. I also use the final review at the end of the day to make any necessary changes or additions to the deadline tracker. I keep the charts on my desk all the time and take them with me to any meetings I have to attend. It’s one of the most important self-management tools that I use.”

In effect, your mission is about how he/she manages his/her time. You may also want to say:

“I know from my own experience that I can allow myself to be easily distracted. Make sure you get rid of anything that can distract you like answering phone calls and emails. If I am listening to the radio-especially talk radio-my concentration suffers. I know that sounds hard to do and your job requires you to answer the phone whenever it rings, but if these things are distracting you and keeping you from performing important tasks like meeting deadlines you should try your best to have someone else answer the phones for a short time while you concentrate on meeting a deadline or say to whomever calls that your time is limited and ask if you can call them back as soon as possible.”

“Identify specific times during the workday that are the best times for you to focus on meeting deadlines. Try and block those times from being interrupted. It may help to tell the people around you that you’re working on something that requires some uninterrupted time and to please try to leave you alone for an hour or however long you think you need.”

“Let’s try something until you feel comfortable with using the Deadline Tracker. Every day, before we leave for the day, let’s get together to briefly cover the deadlines you’re working on and how you’re planning to meet them, ok?”

Other suggestions:

- Use blank 3x5 cards. They are easy to carry, write on, and can be used for lots of other purposes. Clip them together with a small office clip and keep them in a pants pocket or bag.
- Use the tasks function/capability on a computer program like Microsoft Office.
- Use the tasks function/capability on a smart phone, like a Blackberry.

## **WHY IT WILL WORK:**

Almost all of the people who work in an organization are goal-oriented. They like getting things done and the sense of accomplishment that results from completing a task. Using some tangible tool allows them to visualize the tasks and keep them on their minds. Perhaps most importantly, remind yourself to pay attention to him/her and how they are working toward a deadline. Paying attention communicates to him/her that his/her work is important. Knowing one's work is important and that you are paying attention to it also causes people to feel valued, that their contributions are important and meaningful.

**Download a printable blank copy of the [Deadline Tracker here](#).**