

FREE GUIDE FOR BUSINESS OWNERS

Stuck with an employee issue?

What to do, what not to do, and how to protect yourself and your business, from a Chartered Fellow of the CIPD who handles these situations every week.

You already know the situation. The person who is off sick again. The grievance you are hoping settles itself. The one whose performance everyone has quietly started tiptoeing around. It is taking up headspace, and you are not sure what the right next move is.

This short guide will not solve it for you. But it will help you avoid the mistakes that turn a manageable situation into an expensive one, and show you what actually moves things forward.

1. Why small missteps make it serious

Most employee situations do not become serious because of what the employee did. They become serious because of how the owner responded. Acting in the heat of the moment. Skipping a step because it "seemed obvious". Saying something in writing that cannot be unsaid. Leaving it so long that a quiet word is no longer an option.

If it ever reaches a tribunal, they do not just judge whether your decision was right. They judge whether your **process** was fair. That is why owners lose cases they should have won. The reason can be sound, but if the steps were not followed, in the right order and written down, the whole thing becomes unsafe.

2. What it is really costing you

The obvious risk is a claim or a payout. But the real cost is usually quieter and bigger:

- Your time and headspace, week after week, while it drags on.
- Team morale, as others watch what you tolerate and pick up the slack.
- Your best people, who start to check out when standards slip.
- Momentum, because the problem sits in the back of your mind instead of the business.

Handled early, most of this disappears. Handled late, it compounds.

3. Four things that change how this plays out

- **Act early.** The earlier you deal with it, the more options you have. Early, it is a conversation. Late, it is a formal process.
- **Be fair and consistent.** Handle it the way you have handled similar things before. Inconsistency is what looks unfair, and unfair is what costs you.
- **Write it down.** A short, factual note of each conversation as you go. A fair, recorded process is what makes a fair decision stick.

■ **Follow the right order.** The steps matter as much as the outcome. Getting them out of sequence is how a good decision comes unstuck.

4. What actually moves it forward

Owners often wait because they are not sure what the right next step is, and they do not want to make it worse. Understandable, but doing nothing is usually the riskiest move of all. What moves a situation forward is almost always the same short list:

- Get the facts straight before you decide anything.
- Be clear, in writing, about what the concern is and what happens next.
- Give the person a fair chance to respond, and let them bring someone.
- Take advice before you act if there is real risk, not after.

5. How to handle it properly from here

You do not need to diagnose whether it is a grievance, a disciplinary, an absence issue or a legal risk. You need a clear read on how serious it is and a plan for the next step. Start with the free Employee Situation Check: a few plain questions, and you get an honest read on the risk and what to do next. If it is higher risk, a short call is the fastest way to make sure your next move protects you.

Not sure how risky yours is?

Take the free Employee Situation Check at magentahrconsulting.co.uk/employee-situation-check — three minutes, no login. Or book a free 20-minute call with Samantha and talk it through.

Samantha Newton FCIPD, Chartered Fellow of the CIPD, is the employee relations specialist that owner-managed businesses trust when a staff situation gets difficult.

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