

(U) Ask Zelda!: Retired in Place

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice on Workplace Issues

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(U) The column below is unclassified.



Dear Zelda,

There is an employee on my team, let's call him Jerry, who is eligible for retirement, but chooses not to retire for financial reasons. He is well-intentioned and personable, but he does not understand or follow directions very well. Everyone on the team has helped to think of tasks for him that we think he cannot possibly mess up, but often we end up having to redo them anyway. He knows he's being given tasks that aren't central to the office, and it's taking a toll on his mood and motivation, but if we give him more important tasks, someone else will have to do them too. On the one hand, I feel bad the he is having trouble, but on the other, how long must we string him along if he can't actually do the work? If he were to retire, we could fill the billet with someone who would actually contribute. I feel heartless for even saying that, though. Should we keep trying to find menial tasks he can handle, or maintain a charade of giving him meaningful tasks that are assigned to someone else too, or what?

--Heartless Harry

Dear Harry,

It's unclear to me whether or not you are Jerry's supervisor, but I will answer your letter under the assumption that you are.

I can understand that you and others on the team are trying to go easy on Jerry, but that is not helpful. Jerry should be treated no differently than any other employee who isn't pulling his weight. He should be given tasks commensurate with his grade and work role, and then held accountable for them.

You should coach him on how to do things, and counsel him when he does them incorrectly. When he makes a mistake, explain his error and have *him* redo the work--not another employee. If he needs additional training, make sure he gets it. His ACE score should accurately reflect his performance. Following your attempts to train, coach, and correct him, if he still performs sub-par, you should put him on a **Documented Plan for Improved Performance**.

If you think your office is not a good fit for his talents, encourage him to find a job that is. There may be other areas of the Agency where he can contribute meaningfully. It is a disservice to your team and to Jerry to let this situation continue the way it is. Has it occurred to you that maybe he is putting in only a half-hearted effort because he is being given menial work to do? He probably feels as frustrated with the situation as the rest of you.

I know this will sound harsh, but in the future when you get the urge to coddle one of your employees, please go boil an egg instead.

Zelda

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