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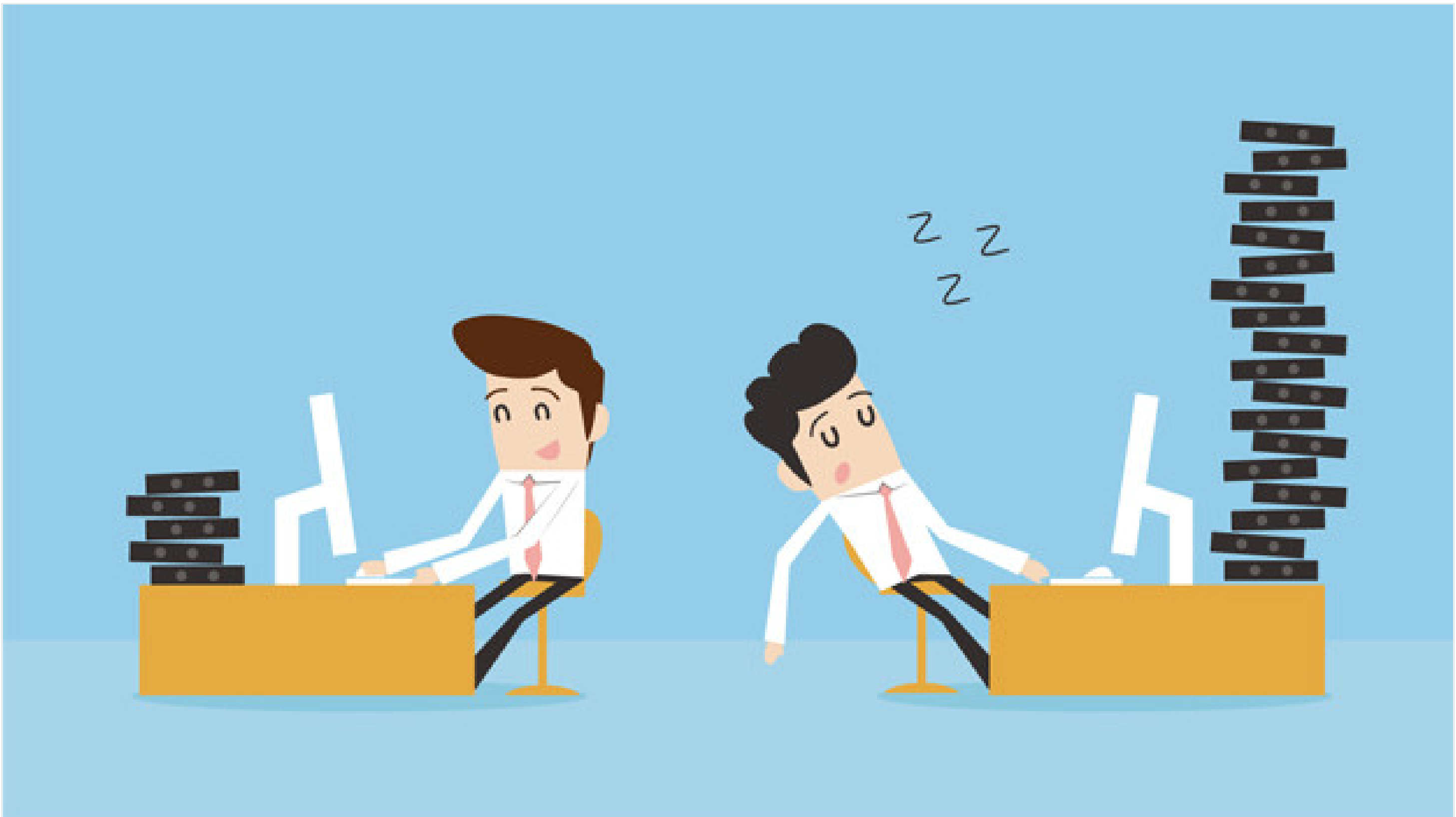

Almost every employee gets off their game at some point in their career. It's not the end of the world, and the right kind of coaching often will turn around underperformers and get them back to full productivity.

But how long do you spend trying to bring them up to speed?

In a competitive recruitment market, it can be tempting to just keep poor performers around and hope they'll eventually grow into the role. But there are real costs to this strategy — and not just financial. Here are five ways a poor performer can hurt your

work longer hours or carry a heavier load because a colleague's work isn't up to par. The last thing you want is a team of discouraged, stressed-out employees.

2. Reduced productivity — Poor performance kicks off a domino effect of negativity. As team morale drops, output quality and quantity begin to suffer. And soon you find that one problem employee has eradicated much of the cohesiveness, productivity and goodwill of your team.

Not only do the bad apple's coworkers suffer, but so do you. Respondents in the Robert Half survey reported they dedicate an average of 26 percent of their time to supervising poorly performing employees. That's more than 10 wasted hours a week they could have applied toward tasks with a greater ROI, such as business development or renewing clients.

3. Undermined authority — Employees notice everything you do and will judge you when you make a bad hire. If you make a bad enough choice, they may even lose faith in your ability to lead. You could find yourself with team members who second-guess your decisions and are unenthusiastic about your initiatives. This leads to staff conflicts, slows down the progress of firm initiatives and further impacts performance, theirs and yours.

4. Lost business — Your clients rely on your firm for accurate results. An underperformer not only fails to deliver on this promise but can upset clients in other ways. Missed deadlines, unprofessional communication and nonrenewing clients can occur when a public accounting firm underdelivers.

5. Significant costs and time to find a replacement — Eventually, you'll have to replace chronic underperformers. That eats up even more of your money, energy and time. One Robert Half study found it takes 17 weeks for management to rectify this situation. With the overall unemployment rate around 4 percent, and even lower in

packages that fall below candidates' expectations are probably not going to win them over to your side. Use industry resources such as the Robert Half Salary Guide for Accounting and Finance Professionals to help determine what your top pick's starting salary should be.
- **Hone in on soft skills.** A new hire could be an auditing genius and a whiz with several financial systems. But if that person clashes with colleagues and clients, he or she simply doesn't belong on your team. During the recruitment process, pay as much attention to candidates' interpersonal abilities as their accounting and technological prowess.
- **Work with a staffing agency.** Properly recruiting and vetting candidates takes time, time many managers may not feel they have available. A specialized recruiter can handle much of the work involved and help make the hiring process faster and more effective.

Hiring mistakes are expensive in more ways than one. But when you're careful about the choices you make to begin with, you can avoid paying the high price of having a low performer on your team.

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Paul McDonald is senior executive director at Robert Half, the world's first and largest specialized staffing firm. He writes and speaks frequently on hiring, workplace and career-management topics. Over the course of more than 30 years in the recruiting field, McDonald has advised thousands of company leaders and job seekers on how to hire and get hired.

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