# Many Poor Performers Are Just Disinterested, Supervisors Say

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The number one reason federal employees fail in a critical job duty—and therefore leave themselves open to being disciplined on performance grounds—is simple disinterest in making the effort to succeed, federal supervisors said in a survey conducted by the MSPB.

An employee “not interested in doing the necessary work to succeed” was cited as a cause to some extent or to a great extent by 74 percent of supervisors in a 2016 survey who had had a subordinate who failed what in performance evaluation terms is called a “critical element” of the job. Second most common, cited by 59 percent, was that the employee was not suited for that particular type of job.

Both of those factors “can often be a result of poor selection choices for the position,” said a white paper that reflected some observations of a recent MSPB newsletter article. It said that in the survey, of employees who agreed that their job made good use of their abilities, 84 percent said that they were inspired to do their best work; in contrast, of those who disagreed about the use of their abilities, only 24 percent said they were inspired to do their best work.

Agencies can help both employees and themselves, it said, by making clear in the hiring process the personal characteristics the job requires—such as whether they enjoy working with the public.

Following those two, the most common reasons for failing in an important element of the job were that the employee was distracted by personal matters and that the employee engaged in misconduct, such as being AWOL or being abusive toward coworkers or customers.

The least commonly cited reasons for failure among the possibilities listed on the survey were that the employee lacked the needed resources or tools, that the employee was the target of an intrapersonal work conflict, or that the employee was given more work than he or she could handle.