THE PEOPLE PLAYBOOK · SOP 3 OF 4

Developing

Book Three of the People Playbook for [FIRM NAME]

Document owner	[PEOPLE LEAD]
Approved by	[APPROVER]
Applies to	All employees of [FIRM NAME]
Version	1.0
Effective date	
Next scheduled review	

Part of The Law Firm Operating System Implementation Workbook

Contents

1. How to Use This Standardized Operating Procedure (SOP)

This is Book Three of the People Playbook. Onboarding ends at the Day 90 decision. This document owns everything after it: the ongoing work of making a confirmed employee clearer about their role, better at their job, and more valuable to the firm every year they stay. It runs until the person leaves, at which point Retaining takes over.

Book	Covers	Ends At
Book One: Recruiting and Hiring	Requisition through signed offer.	The signed conditional offer and a cleared background check.
Book Two: Onboarding	Signed offer through Day 90.	The Day 90 decision.
Book Three: Developing	Day 91 onward.	Continuous. Runs for as long as the person is employed.
Book Four: Retaining	Engagement, compensation cadence, turnover, and separations.	Continuous.

1.1 What This SOP Assumes

- **Development is a system, not a series of good intentions.** Training is something you do to someone. Development is a rhythm that runs whether or not anyone is thinking about it this week.
- **People perform best when they know the expectation.** There is nothing worse than preparing to let someone go and realizing you never told them what success looked like.
- **Decisions about money and title must be predictable.** The fastest way to damage a firm is to let people conclude that advancement runs on favor.
- **Most of the value is in the middle.** Roughly a fifth of any workforce are top performers and a fifth are the ones you will eventually lose. The remaining sixty percent are where a development system earns its keep, and they are the group most firms ignore.

1.2 Before You Use It: Customize These Six Things

Placeholder	Replace With
[FIRM NAME]	Your firm's name.
[PEOPLE LEAD]	Whoever owns the people system end to end.
[MANAGER]	The employee's direct supervisor, one person.
[APPROVER]	Owner, managing partner, or Chief Operating Officer (COO). Signs raises, promotions, and any separation.
[REVIEW MONTHS]	The two months a year in which reviews happen. Pick them and never move them.
[RAISE MONTH]	The single month in which raises take effect. Section 8.3 explains why it should be one month.

This Is a Template, Not Legal Advice

Performance documentation, pay decisions, promotions, and anything approaching discipline all carry exposure that varies by state. Pay decisions in particular can create pay-equity problems that stay invisible until they are expensive.

Have employment counsel licensed in your state review this document, your review sheet, and your improvement plan template before first use.

2. Roles and Responsibilities

Role	Owns	Does Not Own
[MANAGER]	Role clarity for every direct report. Weekly one-on-ones. Ongoing feedback. Both semiannual reviews. The KPI conversation. The first recommendation on raises, promotions, and improvement plans.	Final say on money or title. Managers recommend and [APPROVER] decides.
[PEOPLE LEAD]	The system itself: that reviews happen on schedule, that the review sheet is the same firm-wide, that raise decisions are consistent across managers, that career pathways exist and are current, and that evaluators are trained.	Individual performance judgments.
[APPROVER]	Approving raises, promotions, and any separation. Owning the payroll ratio. Breaking a deadlock between a manager and [PEOPLE LEAD].	Being the first to hear about a performance problem. If a problem reaches the approver unannounced, the cadence failed.
The Employee	Knowing their own KPIs, their pathway, and where they stand. Raising concerns through the scheduled channel rather than storing them up.	Setting their own standard. The bar belongs to the firm.
Department Leaders	Running the weekly departmental meeting. Presenting at the quarterly. Developing the people below them. Training up leaders is a leadership duty rather than an administrative service.	Delegating any of this to HR administration.

3. Role Clarity

Walk into the firm, stop any employee, and ask what their role is. If they cannot tell you with full clarity, you have a role clarity problem, and no amount of measurement downstream will fix it. Without role clarity the firm cannot run without you, which defeats the purpose of building a system at all.

3.1 The Role Clarity Audit

Run this annually, and any time the firm reorganizes. It takes an afternoon and it is the cheapest diagnostic in this document.

1. Ask every employee, individually, to describe their role in two sentences and name their three objective KPIs.
2. Ask their manager the same two questions about them, separately.
3. Compare the answers. Any gap is a role clarity defect, and it belongs to the manager rather than the employee.
4. Where the two answers differ, fix the Job Description first and hold the conversation second.

3.2 Writing Duties Specifically

When a Job Description is vague, overly broad, and open to interpretation, employees use the gaps as a reason for not doing the work. "Manage projects" is not a duty. What managing projects means in this firm, on these matters, at this volume, is a duty.

The opposite failure is just as common: five headings hiding twenty duties. If a Job Description has five bullet points where the job has twenty tasks, it is a summary rather than a description, and the twenty tasks are the part people are being held to.

3.3 Addressing Role Confusion

When two people believe they own the same thing, or nobody believes they own it, name the owner in writing the same week. Role confusion left to sit does not stay an operational problem. It becomes resentment, because the people inside it experience it as unfairness.

4. Job Descriptions and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Every position carries three objective KPIs and three subjective KPIs, written on the Job Description itself so there is one governing document rather than two competing ones. Six measures per person, no more.

Treat KPIs as fluid targets that become concrete once assigned. They are reviewed and adjusted as firm goals change, and they are not a set-and-forget exercise. They also exist to improve the firm and reach its goals rather than to micromanage the team, and people can tell the difference within a month.

4.1 Objective KPIs

Objective KPIs are grounded in hard data: outcomes that can be consistently measured, recorded, and compared over time. Demands sent, settlements, cases filed, cases closed, revenue, margin, response time. The numbers are the numbers.

The Six Questions

1. What is the firm goal?
2. How does this position contribute to the firm goal?
3. What should I measure to confirm that the contribution is being made?
4. What is the standard for that metric? If you are measuring cases filed by a legal assistant, how many is a hit?
5. How will the data be captured?
6. When will the data be shared with the individual employee?

Question six is the one firms skip, and skipping it is what turns a KPI into a grievance. If the employee cannot see the number as often as they are judged on it, they are being graded on a test they never saw.

Category	Examples
Legal Production	Demands sent, settlements, cases filed, cases closed.
Sales Performance	Number of matters signed, total revenue generated, average case value.
Operational Efficiency	Units produced per hour, rate of defects, time to complete a cycle.
Client Satisfaction	Net Promoter Score, average time to resolve an issue, repeat-client percentage.
Financial Health	Profit margin, return on investment, cash flow, revenue per employee.
People	Turnover rate, average time to fill a vacancy, percentage of employees meeting their targets.

Prefer Percentages to Counts

A count punishes the person whose caseload happens to be light this quarter. A percentage survives the fluctuation, which is why "settle 7% of your active caseload" is a better KPI than "settle fourteen cases."

The worked standard for a personal injury attorney is the 10-7-10 rule: demand on 10% of your caseload, settle 7% of your caseload, at an average of $10,000 in attorney's fees.

4.2 Subjective KPIs

Subjective KPIs rely on qualitative judgment rather than numerical data. They cover the parts of performance that are difficult to quantify and impossible to ignore: leadership, communication, teamwork, creativity, problem-solving. You know when someone is missing them, and no report is needed to tell you.

Every leader in the firm is already using subjective judgment to evaluate people. Most simply do not call it that. Writing it down converts a private impression into something the employee can see, question, and improve against, and that is the whole argument for this section.

Four Examples

Subjective KPI	What Is Being Assessed
Leadership	The ability to inspire and motivate others, make effective decisions, and handle challenges with confidence. Criteria might include setting a positive example, delegating effectively, and handling conflict within the team.
Communication	Clearly conveying information, listening, and adapting to the audience. Criteria might include how they present ideas in meetings, how they respond to feedback, and how they collaborate.
Adaptability	Responding to change, learning new skills, and handling the unexpected. Criteria might include speed of adapting to new technology, willingness to take on new responsibility, and performance under pressure.
Client Focus	Dedication to meeting client needs. Criteria might include building relationships, resolving issues, and going beyond what was asked.

The Default Trio to Avoid

Given a blank page, most firms write the same three subjective KPIs for every position: positive attitude, works with urgency, detail oriented. Those may be required for some roles and they are not required for all of them.

Subjective KPIs are unique to each position. If the same three appear on every Job Description in the firm, nobody has done the work.

Six Practices That Make Subjective KPIs Defensible

1. **Establish Clear Criteria.** Write the behaviors that demonstrate the KPI. For teamwork: actively listening, contributing ideas, supporting colleagues. Then tell the team what the criteria are.
2. **Use Multiple Perspectives.** Gather input from peers, subordinates, and other leaders rather than relying on one person's read.
3. **Train the Evaluators.** Managers are taught how to assess subjective performance fairly and consistently, how to recognize and reduce their own bias, and how to give constructive feedback. This is a training obligation rather than an assumption.
4. **Combine Subjective With Objective.** Never read one without the other.
5. **Document and Discuss.** Every conversation requires documentation. Assessments are written down and discussed with the employee at review.
6. **Review and Update the KPIs.** As firm goals change, the measures change with them.

4.3 Changing a KPI

Communicate any KPI change at the earliest possible moment, so nobody experiences it as the goalposts moving. Changes are made with input from the team and released with enough time for people to adapt. A KPI may change at a review or at a defined change point with notice. It never changes mid-period, retroactively, or in response to a single bad month.

4.4 Following Up Is Not Optional

If you are measuring something, respect the employee enough to follow up on it. Measuring someone and never mentioning the measurement tells them the number was never the point, and they will treat it accordingly.

The same applies to the data itself. If you are not making decisions from the KPIs you collect, the collection is pointless and the dashboard becomes a spreadsheet full of numbers that wastes everyone's time.

5. The Meeting Cadence of Accountability

Development happens in the rhythm rather than in the annual review. Four standing meetings, plus the one-on-one.

Meeting	Frequency	Length and Who	What Happens
Launch	Yearly	Full day, everyone	Review of the prior year. Vision and mission. Strategic goals and the plan for the year ahead. Department leads present. Off-site where the budget allows.
Quarterly	Every 90 days	Half to full day. Leadership, department heads, key project leads	Performance data. Changes in the external environment. Strategy adjustment. Each department presents progress, challenges, and next-quarter plans. Leaders present for fifteen minutes each.
Monthly	Monthly	One to two hours. Department heads and key staff	Key metrics. Project updates. Challenges. Next month's plan.
Weekly	Weekly	Thirty to sixty minutes. The whole department	Last week's accomplishments, roadblocks, and the coming week. Round-robin, then group discussion.
One-on-One	Weekly	Thirty minutes. Manager and one report	See Section 5.3.

5.1 The Three Quarterly Questions

The quarterly meeting runs on ninety-day horizons because most people do not have more than ninety days in the tank for any one project. Every miss gets three questions.

ASK *"Where did we miss?"*

ASK *"Why did we miss?"*

ASK *"How do we fix it?" On this one, generate three to five different solutions rather than one.*

Sizing rule: under about twenty people, everyone can attend the quarterly. Once the firm has ten to fifteen leaders, the quarterly becomes a leadership meeting and the wider firm receives the output rather than the debate.

5.2 Weekly Departmental Meetings

Every department holds a weekly meeting. Departmental rather than all-hands: marketing, intake, production, attorneys, finance, each separately. The frame is deliberately short-range. What decisions need to be made and what conversations need to be had to move the business forward one week. This is not long-term thinking, and treating it as long-term thinking is what makes weekly meetings feel like a waste.

5.3 The One-on-One

Weekly, thirty minutes, standing, between a manager and one direct report. It belongs to the employee rather than the manager. It does not get cancelled. It gets moved.

The Standing One-on-One Agenda

1. What did you get done, and what got stuck?

2. Your KPIs. Where are the numbers this week?

3. What do you need from me?

4. Anything you have been sitting on?

5. One thing about your development or your pathway, at least monthly.

This meeting is what makes the semiannual review contain no surprises. A firm that runs weekly one-on-ones honestly will never conduct a review that shocks anyone.

5.4 Rules for Every Meeting

1. **Open on vision, mission, and values.** Every meeting, without exception. It takes ninety seconds and it is what keeps the foundation of the firm alive in ordinary weeks.
2. **No organic meetings.** Have an agenda and make sure everyone follows it. The agenda goes out in advance and lists the topics, the time allocated to each, and the desired outcomes.
3. **Bring data.** Relevant reports and research, not recollections.
4. **End with decisions, assignments, and next steps**, documented. Everyone leaves with something they owe.
5. **Somebody takes notes, every time.**
6. **Rate the meeting.** Participants score it at the end and give feedback on the score.
7. **Participation is a duty rather than a preference.** If you thought the meeting was poor, the first question is what you contributed to it. For quiet attendees, direct a pointed question at them early so they speak first.

The Meeting Return on Investment Test

Ten people in a room at $20 an hour is a $200 meeting. Hold the meeting to a 10x return, so it should produce at least $2,000 of value, and hold each participant to a 5x contribution.

Run ten meetings a week at that standard and the arithmetic reaches roughly $1 million a year. Run them without an agenda and the same arithmetic runs the other way.

6. Coaching and Ongoing Feedback

Feedback is ongoing rather than confined to reviews, and the reason is practical: it prevents surprises when the formal review arrives. Nobody enjoys negative feedback, and people learn more from it than from praise, which is exactly why it has to be delivered often enough to be normal.

6.1 What Good Feedback Looks Like

- **Specific and actionable.** Not "be more organized." The behavior, the situation, and what to do instead.
- **Timely.** Given soon after the behavior rather than saved for the review.
- **About behaviors and outcomes rather than traits.** Not "you're not a team player," but "I've noticed you tend to work independently, and there are places where collaborating would produce a better result."
- **Balanced in volume.** Use the same amount of energy appraising the work as you use criticizing it. This is a quantity instruction, and it should be measured as one.

6.2 The Negativity Audit

If the only thing an employee hears when you appear is a correction, they will start avoiding you, and then they will start tuning you out. Owners who communicate nothing but negative feedback lose people steadily over years and rarely connect the two.

Once a quarter, every manager reviews their own last quarter of one-on-ones and answers one question in writing: what proportion of what I said was corrective? If the honest answer is nearly all of it, that is the finding, and it is a finding about the manager.

7. The Semiannual Review

Every employee is reviewed twice a year, in [REVIEW MONTHS]. More often than that produces no additional benefit. Once a year lets too much time pass before a correctable problem gets corrected. New hires join the cycle at their first [REVIEW MONTHS] after the Day 90 review, and the 30, 60, and 90 day series in Book Two does not count toward it.

Four things are assessed: the objective KPIs, the subjective KPIs, culture fit against the firm's employee standards, and overall performance. A standardized sheet is what makes the assessment objective and fair, and Appendix C is that sheet.

7.1 Preparing for the Review

1. Review the employee's Job Description, performance goals, and the relevant metrics and data.
2. Gather feedback from colleagues, clients, or others who work with them.
3. Reflect on achievements, challenges, and growth across the period.
4. Plan the discussion: accomplishments, areas for improvement, future goals, and their concerns.
5. Prepare specific examples and questions in advance.

Prepare for the review as though you were the one being reviewed, and treat it as an important meeting, because it is an important meeting to the person sitting across from you. There is nothing worse as an employee than a review where the reviewer knows nothing about your work and has not prepared.

7.2 Conducting the Meeting

1. **Open on achievements and contributions.** Starting on a positive note sets a collaborative tone.
2. **Move to areas for improvement.** Specific, behavior-based, and anchored to examples.
3. **Discuss future goals and development.** Manager and employee set the next period's goals jointly, realistic and measurable and aligned to both the person's aspirations and the firm's objectives.
4. **Hand them the floor.** Their thoughts, concerns, and questions. It has to be a two-way conversation or it is a lecture with a form attached.

Afterward, document the discussion and every agreed goal and action, then follow up on them between reviews. The documentation exists to track progress and maintain accountability, and it is the record the firm will need if the relationship ever ends badly.

7.3 The Review Instrument

Appendix C scores all four domains on a 1 to 5 scale with written anchors. Objective KPIs are scored against the number. Subjective KPIs are scored against the written behavior criteria from Section 4.2, with at least one input from someone other than the manager. Culture fit is scored against the firm's employee standards.

Weighting is a firm decision. The default in Appendix C is 40% objective, 40% subjective, and 20% culture fit, which deliberately prevents the numbers from outvoting the behavior. Hitting the targets does not excuse operating outside the standards.

8. Raises

There has to be a system for giving raises. Without one, every raise becomes a negotiation, and every negotiation becomes evidence for whoever believes the firm runs on favor.

The band runs from 3% to 12%. Three percent goes to someone who met expectations and is not going anywhere. Twelve percent goes to someone who performed in an extraordinary way. Resist going above 12% unless the market has genuinely moved, because the ceiling is what keeps the payroll budget intact.

8.1 Why the Ceiling Exists

At a 40% payroll ratio, a 10% across-the-board raise requires the firm to grow two and a half times to stay level. Generosity in a good year that ignores the next one is how firms arrive at a position where they cannot give anyone anything.

The slow version of the same failure is more common. Ten years of modest annual raises produced a director of operations earning close to $200,000 in a firm generating $4.5 million, a role that was refilled for $60,000 less at the same output. Small raises compound into structural problems when nobody is watching the ratio.

8.2 Two Kinds of Raise

Type	How It Works
Performance-Based	Tied to achievement of specific goals, metrics, and outcomes. Guided by clear, measurable criteria that the employee knows in advance. Evaluated through the semiannual reviews, with a transparent evaluation process.
Market-Based Adjustment	Driven by the annual market assessment in Book Four, Section 3.2, which compares the firm's pay to similar roles in the same industry and region and sets the target at market plus 10%. Applied across the board to everyone in a role or department rather than to an individual. May be combined with a performance raise, and may exceed the band when the market has genuinely moved. It may never breach the 40% payroll ceiling.

8.3 Turning a Review Into a Number

Publish the mapping and apply it the same way to everyone. The default below runs off the Appendix C review score.

Review Score	Raise	What It Means
4.5 to 5.0	10 to 12%	Extraordinary. Exceeded on both objective and subjective measures and visibly raised the standard for others. Expect very few of these.
4.0 to 4.4	7 to 9%	Strong across the board, with at least one area of clear excellence.
3.5 to 3.9	5 to 6%	Solidly above expectation. The healthy middle of a well-run firm.
3.0 to 3.4	3 to 4%	Met expectations. Not extraordinary, and not going anywhere.
Below 3.0	0%	Below standard. No raise, and an improvement plan under Section 11 rather than a quiet nothing.

Raises take effect in [RAISE MONTH], once a year, for everyone. Reviews happen twice a year and the second one feeds the raise. Running raises on a single date rather than on employment anniversaries is what makes the band comparable across people, which is the entire reason for having a band.

8.4 Communicating a Raise

- Name the reason: performance, market, or both.
- Cite specific achievements. A percentage with no story attached teaches nothing and motivates nothing.
- For a market adjustment above the band, say so explicitly, so the employee does not expect that size of raise every year.
- For 0%, say it in person, before the raise month, with the improvement plan already written. Nobody should learn their performance was unacceptable by noticing that their pay did not change.

8.5 When the Firm Cannot Pay

Where a raise is not possible, the alternatives are flexible hours, additional paid time off, professional development, deferred compensation, or a future-dated bonus. Use them honestly and attach a date.

Be careful with the floor. If the firm cannot fund 3% for people who met expectations, that is a business problem to name out loud rather than a performance message to send by silence. And when someone asks for a raise, treat it as a normal request. Owners who take the question personally teach their people to stop asking and start looking.

9. Promotions

Dying organizations do not give promotions. Promotions and raises perceived to come from favoritism rather than merit will do more damage to morale than not promoting at all, so the process below exists as much to protect the firm's credibility as to select the right person.

9.1 Criteria

Performance, skills, leadership potential, and alignment with what the firm needs, together with the financial capacity to fund the role. Where the firm is expanding, expertise in the direction of expansion counts.

Do not over-title. A ten-person firm does not have a Chief Operating Officer. It might have an office manager or a director of operations. Over-titling commits the firm to compensation greater than the contribution, and it is very hard to walk back.

9.2 The Promotion Process

1. **Review performance and potential.** [MANAGER] and [PEOPLE LEAD] assess past achievements, leadership qualities, and readiness for new responsibility. Input from colleagues and clients may be considered.
2. **Identify candidates.** Openings are published. A process that is objective and open to everyone when a new position becomes available is the firm's protection against the favoritism charge.
3. **Trial by demonstration.** Before the title, the work. Give the candidate a high-stakes project or a team to lead, and assess the leadership in action rather than in the abstract.
4. **Decide.** [APPROVER] makes the final call with [PEOPLE LEAD]'s input, on objective criteria plus the candidate's potential to succeed in the new role.
5. **Tell the people who were not selected, personally and first.** Say clearly that not being selected this time does not mean they are not valued.
6. **Announce and celebrate publicly**, then hold a one-on-one with the promoted person covering the new role, responsibilities, expectations, and compensation, with room for their questions.
7. **Support them afterward** with additional training, mentoring, a gradual assumption of responsibility, and regular check-ins through the first few months.

9.3 Two Failures Worth Naming

Silence, and the Title Without the Authority

The silent promotion. A promotion nobody hears about is a raise with extra work attached. One partner promoted without any announcement described the experience as devastating, and went on to celebrate every promotion at the firm he later built.

The title without the authority. When someone is promoted over former peers, the firm has to impute the authority onto them so they can lead with confidence. In practice that means the owner says out loud, to the team, what this person now decides. A new leader left to establish authority alone against people who were their equals last week will fail, and it will look like their failure.

Teach the scarcity before people are competing for a seat rather than after. You cannot have two people in the same position any more than a team can field two catchers. Saying so early is kinder than letting someone assume otherwise for two years.

10. Career Pathways

A career pathway is an opportunity rather than a promise. It is a guide, not the gospel, and it demonstrates what is possible if the employee performs and the firm has the seat. Say that on the document itself, and then publish it anyway.

The objection most owners raise is that a published pathway becomes a commitment they will be held to. The answer is precision about its status, because a pathway vague enough to be safe is also useless. It has to be objective enough that an employee can align their behavior to it.

People leave when they believe there is no advancement available to them, and they say so in interviews years later. A visible ladder with a known next step is one of the few retention levers that costs nothing to build.

10.1 The Seven Steps

1. **Assess Firm Needs and Opportunities.** Identify key roles, the skills they require, and where growth is coming from, tied to the strategic plan.
2. **Identify Key Roles and Progression Paths.** Map the typical trajectory in each department. Each step defined with specific responsibilities, required skills, and expectations.
3. **Define Skills and Competencies.** For every role on the pathway, plus any certifications or experience required.
4. **Provide Development Opportunities.** Formal training, mentorship, on-the-job learning, online courses, shadowing a current leader, or leading a smaller project.
5. **Set Clear Expectations and Goals** through the review cycle, realistic and measurable and aligned to the person's aspirations.
6. **Encourage Ongoing Feedback.** Quarterly check-ins to review progress, discuss obstacles, and adjust the development plan.
7. **Monitor and Adjust the Pathways.** Career pathways are not static. Update them as roles, the market, and the strategy change.

Attach training hours to each rung. A pathway that states how many hours of development the firm expects at each level is one an employee can act on this month rather than admire from a distance.

10.2 Building the Ladder

Start with the three or four ladders the firm has: intake, legal support, attorney, and operations. Define each rung with the Job Description, the KPIs, the skills, and the training hours. Appendix F is the template.

Then publish them. An unpublished pathway retains none of the value that justified building it.

11. When Someone Is Off Standard

Missing the numbers is not, by itself, a reason to let someone go. Sometimes a person was hired into a position they were never equipped for and are well equipped for a different one, and this happens far more often than most owners notice. A legal assistant who cannot hit the objective metrics may be exactly right for intake or sales.

Two rules govern this section and neither is optional. No employee is disciplined or terminated without a second look at the subjective assessment. And where the subjective read and the objective results disagree, a second leader evaluates before the firm acts. One department once recommended terminating an employee whose metrics were all in line. Moved to another department under a different supervisor, the same person thrived. The problem had been the relationship rather than the employee.

11.1 The Sequence

Stage	Duration	What Happens
1. Coach	2 to 4 weeks	Ordinary management. Named in the one-on-one, specifically, with the gap and the expected change, and recorded in the one-on-one notes. Most performance problems end here and never become anything else.
2. Second Look	1 week	Required before anything formal. Read the subjective assessment against the objective results. Where they diverge in either direction, a second leader evaluates independently before the firm proceeds.
3. Diagnose the Cause	1 week	Training gap, tools, workload, the manager relationship, or genuine mismatch. Ask whether the firm delivered what it promised. A gap the firm caused is not a performance problem.
4. Redeploy	30-day trial	Where the person fits elsewhere. A defined trial in the new seat with a different supervisor evaluating, written expectations, and a decision date. Compensation held during the trial unless the role is materially different.
5. Written Improvement Plan	30 to 60 days	Where redeployment is not available or not appropriate. Specific gaps, specific expected outcomes, specific support the firm will provide, weekly checkpoints, and a stated decision date. Signed by both parties.
6. Decide	At the stated date	Met, and the plan closes in writing. Not met, and [APPROVER] decides with counsel involved before any separation. Handled under Book Four.

11.2 The Documentation Rule

Every conversation requires documentation, and it goes in the personnel file at the time rather than when it becomes necessary. A firm that once had to defend a termination discovered that the department leader had never written anything down, and the lesson cost them a bar complaint and a lawsuit.

Job Descriptions, plus documented coaching, training, and discipline against them, are what give a firm the best chance of ending an employment relationship appropriately. Leaders are often reluctant to put their assessments in writing. The written record protects the leader and the employee both.

11.3 Where the Effort Goes

Roughly a fifth of a workforce are top performers and roughly a fifth will not work out. The remaining sixty percent are the group this document exists for. Eliminate the bottom, and spend the real effort improving the middle. A firm that manages only its stars and its problems is ignoring most of its people.

12. Development Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Six numbers on the development system itself, reviewed quarterly by [PEOPLE LEAD].

KPI	How to Calculate It	Target	What It Tells You
Reviews Held On Time	Reviews completed within the review month divided by reviews due.	100%	The system's pulse. Late reviews mean the cadence has stopped.
One-on-One Adherence	One-on-ones held divided by one-on-ones scheduled, reported by manager.	90% or better	Report it by manager rather than firm-wide. A manager below 70% is the finding.
Role Clarity Score	Employees who can state their role and three objective KPIs divided by employees asked, from the annual audit.	100%	The clarity test converted into a number.
Internal Promotion Rate	Roles filled internally divided by roles filled.	30% or better	Whether the pathways are real. A firm that never promotes internally has pathways on paper only.
Raise Distribution	The spread of raise percentages across the band.	A real distribution rather than a single number	If everyone receives the same percentage, the system is not differentiating and the review process is decorative.
Improvement Plan Outcomes	Plans ending in met divided by plans opened.	Track rather than target	A rate near zero means plans are being used to document exits rather than to fix performance. Worth knowing about yourself.

13. Appendices

Appendix A: Role Clarity Audit

Annual. Ask separately, then compare.

Employee	Their Answer: Role in Two Sentences, and Three Objective KPIs	Manager's Answer: Same Two Questions

Gaps found, and who is fixing the Job Description

Appendix B: KPI Worksheet

Position	
Manager	
Effective From	

Objective KPIs. Run each through the six questions in Section 4.1.

Objective KPI	Target	Data Source	Shared With Employee
1.			
2.			

Objective KPI	Target	Data Source	Shared With Employee
3.			

Subjective KPIs. Unique to this position. Write the behaviors that demonstrate each one.

Subjective KPI	Behaviors That Demonstrate It	Who Else Provides Input
1.		
2.		
3.		

Check: are these three subjective KPIs different from the ones on every other Job Description in the firm? If not, write them again.

Appendix C: Semiannual Review Sheet

Employee and Role	
Manager and Date	
Review Period	

Scoring anchors. 5 exceptional, exceeded and raised the standard for others. 4 strong, consistently above expectation. 3 met, reliably at standard. 2 below, a real gap requiring a plan. 1 unacceptable.

Domain	Evidence	Score 1 to 5	Weight
Objective KPI 1			13%
Objective KPI 2			13%
Objective KPI 3			14%
Subjective KPI 1			13%

Domain	Evidence	Score 1 to 5	Weight
Subjective KPI 2			13%
Subjective KPI 3			14%
Culture Fit Against the Employee Standards			20%
Weighted Total			100%

Section	Notes
Achievements. Open here.	
Areas for improvement: behaviors and outcomes, not traits	
Goals for the next period, set jointly	
The employee's own thoughts, concerns, and questions	
Development and pathway actions	

Employee signature and date

Manager signature and date

Appendix D: Raise Decision Record

Employee and Role	
Review Score	
Band From Section 8.3	
Raise Type: Performance, Market, or Both	
Percentage Granted	
If Outside the Band, the Reason	

Effective Date	
Approved By and Date	

Specific achievements cited to the employee

Appendix E: Promotion Record

Role Being Filled	
Posted Internally On	
Candidates Considered	
Demonstration Task and Outcome	
Decision and Rationale	
Non-Selected Candidates Spoken To On	
Announcement Date	
Authority Imputed: What Was Said, To Whom	
Check-In Dates for the First Three Months	

Appendix F: Career Pathway Map

One per ladder. Publish it.

Rung	Job Description	Key Skills to Reach It	Training Hours Expected	Typical Time in Role

State the status on the document itself. This pathway is a guide rather than a guarantee. It shows what is possible if the employee performs and the firm has the seat.

Appendix G: Weekly One-on-One Record

Employee and Manager	
Week Of	

Agenda	Notes
Done, and stuck	
KPI position this week	
What they need from me	
Anything they have been sitting on	
Development or pathway, at least monthly	
Agreed actions	

Appendix H: Performance Improvement Plan

Have counsel review this template before first use.

Employee and Role	
Manager and Date Opened	
Second Look Completed By (Required)	
Cause Diagnosed: Training, Tools, Workload, Relationship, or Mismatch	
Redeployment Considered? Outcome	
Plan Length: 30 or 60 Days	
Decision Date	

Specific Gap	Expected Outcome and How It Is Measured	Support the Firm Will Provide

Checkpoint	Date	Progress
Week 1		
Week 2		
Week 3		
Week 4		

Outcome at the decision date: Met, closed in writing. Partially met, one extension only with a new date. Not met, referred to [APPROVER] with counsel involved.

Employee signature and date

Manager signature and date

Document Control

Owner: [PEOPLE LEAD] · Approver: [APPROVER] · Version: 1.0 · Effective: _____________ · Next review: _____________

Review annually and after each raise cycle. The raise distribution KPI in Section 12 is the fastest signal that the review process has stopped differentiating.

The People Playbook: Book One Recruiting and Hiring · Book Two Onboarding · **Book Three Developing** · Book Four Retaining.