

The McKenzie Mailer

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Discipline - It's Easy When You Have the Facts

There are two things to keep in mind when disciplining an employee – fairness and consistency. Fairness in that anyone who is not performing satisfactorily should be told that their work performance is not acceptable and given an opportunity to improve. It is also fair that employees be told what the company's expectations are during the interview process and reminded of them as soon into the employment arrangement as possible. Consistency in that all employees should be treated the same, or essentially the same, for similar infractions.

A progressive disciplinary process ensures fairness. In this type of process, there are usually four to five steps. The first step is coaching. Coaching should not be viewed as discipline. If the poor performance or bad behavior does not improve after coaching, the next step is formal counseling. Subsequent steps include verbal warning, a written warning and termination.

Regardless of the step, all discipline should follow this guideline:

1. State what is expected.
2. State what is happening now.
3. A review of previous discussions of substandard performance.
4. Ask questions of the employee.
5. State the consequences of continued non-performance.
6. State how you will follow up & support the employee.
7. Offer encouragement.
8. Confirm the discussion.

Documentation is Key

Whenever discussing a performance issue with an employee, note the time and date of the discussion and the points covered. Even though coaching is not discipline, it is important that you have a record of the date and time you coached the employee and a summary of what was discussed. Keep track of the specific occurrences and dates they occurred. When it is necessary to have a counseling session, you will have the necessary data will be in front of you. An effective manager will make sure that their homework is completed before confronting an employee with a performance problem.

An example of a discussion with an employee could be,

“Our goal is to have all shipping documents posted in the computer correctly before the end of each shift. We discussed the proper way to post shipping documents in the computer system on Tuesday, June 25. I watched you enter the data correctly for three transactions that day and you felt confident that you could handle all transactions correctly. Since that time, ten transactions were input incorrectly. Do you still feel comfortable entering the data?”

This discussion covers items 1 through 4 on the guidelines above. Keep the discussion calm and to the point. Allow the employee an opportunity to explain. Offer additional coaching or training if the employee needs it. If the employee was simply careless, let the employee know that the standards are not being met due to his/her inattention to detail. Let the employee know that you are there to help; that you will follow up more often until you are both comfortable with the level of performance. Tell the employee that you are confident that he/she can do the job. Also let the employee know that if the mistakes continue, you may have to take more formal disciplinary action.

Confirm the Conversation

After talking with the individual, confirm it in writing. Send a memorandum or e-mail confirming your discussion. Be honest and straightforward with the individual. If you have to go to the next level of discipline, your discussion is documented and you will be able to recap all of the prior discussions in future disciplinary actions.

Time and Severity

Keep in mind that a progressive disciplinary process is for the relatively minor infractions that keep happening over and over again. It does not apply to the more severe breaches such as theft, fighting, harassment, threatening behavior or carrying firearms on the premises. These offenses should be dealt with harshly in accordance with your company's policies. Companies should have zero tolerance for these types of offenses.

Next month - more on verbal and written warnings.

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