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HR Management Insights

HOW TO HANDLE EMPLOYEE DISCIPLINE



One of the most frustrating situations to address in any work setting is the employee not performing their job. A constant display of positive discipline becomes imperative for the employee to understand their manager disciplines because he/she cares about their success. Positive discipline takes place through what I refer to as a counseling session. This is not a “warning notice” or “pink slip”; these carry negative connotations. Counseling is sharing with an employee the problem issue and giving the employee the opportunity to correct the behavior. The focus shifts from the content of the session to the character and process of managers as they deliver the content.

If management can master the art of disciplining their employees through counseling, they will be known as being both fair and caring. In addition, by disciplining employees in this manner managers can dramatically lower the potential for litigation while increasing the output level and degree of motivation in their workers. Following is a list of practical and actual items to consider when giving a counseling session. ▶

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The Practical ITEMS in a Counseling Session

- **Remember, if it wasn't written, it didn't happen.**

It is vital to maintain a proverbial "paper trail" of how you counseled with your employee both consistency and fairly.

- **Don't wait.**

Provide discipline as soon as possible so as not to lose the impact of the incident.

- **Be sensitive.**

Show discretion and meet in a quiet location away from others.

- **Be prepared.**

Write up everything and have your support documents copied before the session begins.

Support the session with objective information only. Do not give opinions or personal bias.

Ask the question: "If I were to leave tomorrow, and this issue went to court, would my counseling session report stand on its own merits?"

- **Follow the rule of "just cause."**

Remember to treat everyone the same in the same situation.

- **Think about the session.**

Make sure your heart is focused on growing the employee, not showing you are "right."

- **Always have a witness present for a counseling session, ALWAYS.**

Your witness should be someone seen as being "neutral" such as human resources.

If you are counseling an employee of the opposite sex, have your witness be the same sex as your employee.

- **Remember! How you present the counseling session is your choice. Correcting the problem is the choice of the employee.**

The ACTUAL Counseling Session

- **Don't read the counseling report when giving the session.**

Share in a narrative format. This helps put the employee at ease.

- **Do read the counseling report at the end to make sure you have covered everything.**

This ensures that "what is said" was the same as "what is written."

► *Counseling is sharing with an employee the problem issue and giving the employee the opportunity to correct the behavior.*

- **Remember! An employee in a counseling session usually has one goal in mind: to leave the session.**

Let the employee know they will not leave until they can repeat back in their own words why they are at the session and what they will do to correct the problem. Repeat the session as many times as it takes until this occurs.

Don't be disheartened or angry if the employee cannot repeat the session back to you the first time. Their initial goal is to leave the session, not listen.

- **Don't try to "lump together" more than one discipline issue.**

One counseling session for every problem.

- **Don't be irritated if the employee refuses to sign the session.**

Simply write "refused to sign" on the signature line.

- **Don't get frustrated or mad during any part of the session.**

Be calm, especially when you have to go over a session several times.

- **Directly after the session give the employee a copy of the counseling report.**

- **Don't ever forget your goal during discipline...to do everything possible for your employee to succeed.**

- **Lastly, counseling sessions are not easy. They take practice, practice and more practice.**

Role-play your sessions until you feel comfortable giving them.

Hard as it may be, administering discipline is an everyday part of a manager's job description. The consistency of treating everyone the same in the same situation must become the benchmark if managers hope to be known for valuing others as they would want to be valued. In closing, the Holy Bible paints the same picture in the book of Hebrews when it shares that *No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of right behavior and peace for those who have been trained by it.* Our culture honors positive discipline, the law requires it and, if necessary, your employees' desire it. Go now and make a difference.

About the Author



Ronald F. Smedley, MS is president of Synergistic Resource Associates, a full service human resources consultancy that works with for profit and nonprofit organizations. In addition

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Ron holds a master's degree in industrial/organizational psychology from California State University, Long Beach and a bachelor's degree in psychology from Biola College. In 1993 he was presented with an honorary degree in human resource management and the key to the city while in Kiev, Ukraine as a result of consulting and training in the areas of team building and leadership.

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