

# BASICS OF DISCIPLINE

Disciplining an employee is one of the hardest tasks you will face as a supervisor. If not done well, it may create resentment, low morale, and tension in your department. You also risk discrimination and harassment from employees who feel they have been unfairly singled out.

Needless to say, most supervisors are very uncomfortable when it comes to disciplining employees. Some are afraid of coming down too hard and looking like the 'heavy', others try too hard to show they're in charge and wind up alienating or causing resentment. Still others choose to avoid or ignore many situations that require discipline in hopes that it will just go away.

These approaches are usually unsuccessful.

By ignoring such situations, you are doing a disservice to all employees. You are allowing poor work habits to flourish; you are creating resentment in those employees who work hard; and you are setting your department up for poor performance and even worse - potential accidents.

Let's learn some tools to use and ways to discipline effectively.

## A Fair and Consistent Approach

You must administer discipline very selectively for it to be effective. If you are disciplining often, you have a problem.

***Discipline isn't necessarily a punishment – it's a tool to correct unacceptable behavior.***

## Spelling Out the Rules –

### Talk the Talk

It's basic, in order to know when they're breaking rules, they must know the rules.

Make sure employees:

- Have copies of the employee handbook and other relevant policies/procedures. Give periodic refreshers.
- Understand what your expectations are. Make it clear what they must do to succeed in your department. Spell it out.
- Understand any “unwritten rules” of the workplace. Try to identify all that you can.

## **WALK the WALK**

What is one of the best, most effective ways to communicate the behavior you expect from your employees?

### **‘MODEL IT YOURSELF’**

If you want employees at work early, make sure you are there before them, not the classic “do as I say, not as I do.”

Your employees may not always listen to what you say, but you can be certain they are watching what you are doing.

Show them you have enough self-discipline to follow the rules without being told to. Remember, no matter how hard they are working, as a supervisor, set an example by working harder (or at least appear to).

## **APPLYING CONSEQUENCES**

When rule violations occur, you need to enforce the rule with discipline. It must be immediate, impartial, and fair.

- **Applied evenly.** *Discipline impartially. If employees see that Joe is always late and only gets verbal warnings, and Jane is written up on the first time, you have just damaged your credibility.* Discipline then becomes a form of punishment for less favored employees instead of a tool to help maintain standards. It also opens up the door for *discrimination charges*.

- **Consistently enforced.** Don't expect employees to live up to the rules some days and not on others. *Enforce what you set up, then everyone will know what to expect at all times.*
- **Enforce objectively.** Don't allow your emotions control your actions. Don't react spontaneously; gather the data first. Don't discipline in anger.

Just by following the above may eliminate much of the need to discipline and will create a professional work environment.

## SITUATIONS THAT REQUIRE DISCIPLINE

If the rules are known, most will obey them. If not, you may need to discipline.

First you must be familiar with the policies and the rules or procedures for discipline. The most frequent areas that require discipline are:

- Attendance
  - Punctuality
  - Safety
- Abuse of company time or materials
- Drug and/or alcohol use
- Fighting (or inability to work with others)

## Deciding When to Discipline

The purpose of discipline isn't to punish – it's to change unacceptable behavior into acceptable behavior.

**AGAIN ONE OF THE WORST MISTAKES YOU CAN MAKE IS TO DISCIPLINE WHEN YOU ARE ANGRY.**

**Place emphasis on behavior not anger.**

Use this disciplinary action checklist:

- ❑ **Obtain all the facts.** *Consider just the facts, not the emotions*
- ❑ **Document the Facts.** *Concisely and precisely, use 5 W's and Indian Greeting Sign (Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How.)*
- ❑ **Determine if there is written policy.** *Obtain a copy of it.*
- ❑ **Question whether the rule is fair, applies and that it is enforceable.**
- ❑ **Review past experience.** *For this type of situation, make sure you're being fair and consistent.*
- ❑ **Remain unemotional and impartial.** *Get rid of your anger (but don't give it to someone else.)*
- ❑ **Follow problem-solving process.** (Remember, define the problem, consider solutions, implement, and follow up).

A successful department doesn't rely on punishment. Instead, employees are held accountable for meeting standards, and discipline is used only to correct unacceptable behavior.

Loyalty, motivated people, responsibility, high morale will be the end results.