Writing Effective Disciplinary Policies



A CLEAR AND EFFECTIVE DISCIPLINARY POLICY OFFERS MANY BENEFITS, INCLUDING:

- Clear guidelines for employee behavior. A straightforward, easy to understand disciplinary policy will tell your employees what you expect of them and what conduct you will not tolerate. Enforcing the policy in a uniform manner will show your employees that you take these rules seriously.
- Employee morale. It’s true that the employee you discipline is not likely to enjoy a morale boost, but the rest of your workforce will. Other employees do not like to see a co-worker getting away with poor, unproductive behavior while they work thanklessly at their jobs. And if a problem employee is allowed to misbehave without suffering any consequences, others in the workforce will soon realize that they can get away with slacking off too.
- Protection against employee lawsuits. If you clearly inform your employees of the consequences of poor behavior and enforce your policy fairly, you will buy yourself some insurance in future disputes. It will be more difficult for an employee to argue that his or her termination was unjustified if you can show that you told your employees what conduct would result in discipline, and that this particular employee had been subject to prior disciplinary action.

HOW TO GIVE THE BAD NEWS?

Once you know that an employee has violated a company rule, you will have to dispense some of that discipline promised in your policy. Here are some guidelines to follow:

- Don’t procrastinate. Once you have determined that discipline is in order, set up a meeting with the employee right away. The sooner you place the employee on notice, the sooner he or she will be able to improve.
- Keep it private. Schedule a meeting with your employee to discuss the problem, one on one. Make sure you can meet in a private place.
- Be honest. Your natural tendency may be to accentuate the positive, but now is not the time to indulge it. The purpose of this meeting is to notice and improve poor behavior. You must tell the employee precisely what the problem is, what steps he or she must take to correct it, and the

consequences of failing to do so.

- Be respectful. Let your employee know that you want him or her to improve, and that you will help if you can. Set aside enough time for the meeting so that the employee will have an opportunity to respond. Make sure to listen to your employee’s concerns; it may be that a performance problem is the result of a misunderstanding, or could be easily corrected if you work together.
- Write it down. Document every disciplinary meeting, action or discussion with each of your employees, and place that record in the employee’s personnel file. In the case of a written warning, give the employee a copy of the warning and ask him or her to sign it to acknowledge receipt. These records will help you later, if that employee decides to file a lawsuit.
- Follow up. If you tell your employee that you must see improvement by a certain date, make sure to follow up