



Disciplinary Action Process

*Chuck Swinden
Keystone Consulting*

*"Luck is a matter of Preparation meeting Opportunity"
(Oprah Winfrey)*

As Managers or Supervisors disciplinary action has to be one of the most unpleasant tasks in our job descriptions. However, just as our day to day routines are important, so is the need to provide a reminder to those employees who choose to be indifferent to rules and organization.

So, what does this really mean? To some of us it means pointing out what the employee did wrong and simply walking away. For others, disciplinary action comes about as a result of something which happened while we were not present, and which we are now expected to correct. There are as many reasons as there are people, and each has its unique twist and circumstance.

Disciplinary action is, in my opinion, the final result of a number of situations, behaviours, and actions that have come to a head. It is seldom a result of something that just happened "today". Quite often we don't see (or perhaps choose not to see) what is transpiring before us with the hope that it will correct itself, or that somehow the problem will just...go away.

So how do we handle this situation when it's our turn? Here are some top tips for managers and supervisors who are faced with carrying out a disciplinary action:

Professionalism

Disciplinary action has to be enacted in a professional and humane manner. How can you expect anyone else to believe that you're sincere about the situation? Professionalism will encourage confidence in you and your actions.

Focus on the Behavior not the Person

We've all heard this before but how often do we actually act on it? Depending on the severity of the situation, it's easier said than done. The trick is to check and recheck our own attitudes and beliefs to ensure that we are truly focusing on the behavior and not whether we like or dislike the person.

First things First

Before disciplinary action becomes called for, it's essential to ensure that all staff understand the policies, procedures, and expectations of your organization. If you really look around, you'll quite often find that the behavior in question is being enacted by more than just the individual who got "caught", and may have even become part of the corporate culture. Before embarking on any disciplinary action, you need to make sure that this is not the case. It is worth while re-visiting policy and procedures from time to time.

Make Expectations Clear

People can't do what you expect them to do unless they know what those expectations are. Going on the premise that expectations are clear, and that everyone knows and understands the rules, is not a solid business move. Once expectations have been made clear, you can remind those falling out of grace from time to time what is expected, and why. Be proactive not reactive.

Focus

When disciplinary action is warranted, it is important for you as the Supervisor or Manager to focus on the task at hand. Take the opportunity to ask the individual in question to meet with you in a quiet and undisturbed area. In some cases, you may want to meet off the work premises completely. Most of all make sure that there are no interruptions during this process. How seriously will you be taken if you're fielding a dozen phone calls and having people strolling in and out of your office?

Benchmarking

When benchmarks are used, whether they be task, time, or goal oriented, managers have a foundation on which to build and maintain positive employee performance. Benchmarks, to be effective, must be monitored and followed up using agreed upon timelines to review employee progress. Benchmarks help managers set goals and expectations, give employees a clearly laid out roadmap of what is expected, and provide a structured set of dates for reviewing individual progress.

Do it Now

There is no time like the present. You should have an employee file on all your staff, and you should have documented reviews and achievements along with all information that pertains to the day to day performance. This paints a picture that is invaluable in times when you must question the performance of that employee. The sooner this is started, the easier it is for you to see where the behavior is going or whether its just odd glitch. This is a tool that will be there when you need to see through the smoke so to speak.

Document

This has to be one of the most important actions to remember. Whenever you have a disciplinary action meeting, the participants must arrive at a mutual agreement which includes a course of action, timeframes, benchmarks, and accountability. Otherwise, you've embarked on an exercise in futility.

To make the very most of this meeting, include follow up dates and times, and note who is accountable for this task (or failure to complete the task) to ensure best possible success.

Be Careful

The intent of disciplinary action is, first and foremost, to correct the undesired behaviour. Many times long term, valuable employees are let go or quit because the proper steps to correct undesired behaviour have not been taken. As always, the focus should be on the behavior not the person.

Training

Of course the realization here is that nothing is generic in its nature, and by that we know each situation is, and can be, quite unique. Yet without starting out right the first time, and without the proper training, new managers and supervisors often fall prey to more experienced employees, and in worst case scenarios, lawyers.

[Back to Keystone Consulting Main Site](#)

[Back to Keystone Consulting Resources](#)