

Getting Positive Results When Using Progressive Discipline

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10 TIPS FOR MANAGERS NEWSLETTER

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Progressive Discipline refers to the use of increasingly more serious forms of intervention with an employee who is not performing up to the expectations of an employer. The goal of progressive discipline is always a positive one: to help an employee improve their performance, conduct or behavior while on the job.

Whether this goal is achieved depends to a great extent on the skill of supervisors or managers who are implementing disciplinary action. Follow the right steps to help ensure success.

- First, confirm that the performance issue is NOT a training issue that would better be managed using coaching, training or education. Confirm also that it is also NOT a personal issue (related to family issues, health, addiction, mental health) that would better be managed using referrals to counseling, treatment or personal leave.
- Provide at least one and perhaps two rounds of constructive critical feedback that is specific, timely and clarifies standards and expectations for future improvement. Use "immediate and ongoing" to help the employee understand the timelines for improvement.
- If the employee's response to feedback is unsatisfactory (i.e., his/her performance does not improve immediately and long term), then a verbal warning is warranted. This is the first step in formal progressive discipline.
- If the employee's response to the verbal warning is not satisfactory, then another verbal warning *may be* used (depending on the time elapsed, employee attempts to improve and the seriousness of the performance concern), or it may be better to use a written warning.

The steps in using a written warning are identical to those of a verbal warning with the exception that a letter is given to the employee - thus making the warning "written".

- More than one written warning may be used, however if the employee is not making progress, the supervisor or manager must consider if "more of the same" will create a different and better result.
- If the employee's performance, conduct or behavior does not improve in the long term, the supervisor or manager should consult senior management and/or legal counsel to determine whether the employee should be dismissed.
- If the decision is made to dismiss an employee, then it is crucial that this be done properly. Consult human resources professionals, lawyers and experienced senior managers before writing the dismissal letter and meeting with the employee.

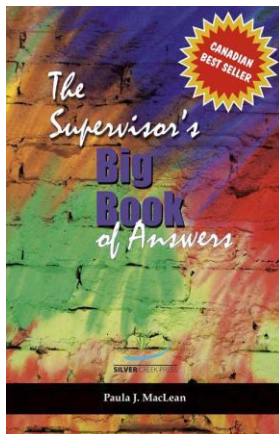
In an effort to "get the point across", some employers use suspensions (with or without pay and of varying duration), demotions (which can be legally risky and can be considered to be an attempt to coerce the employee to resign) or transfers to other parts of the workplace (moving a problem rarely solves it). None of these strategies are likely to lead to the positive outcome of performance improvement. These old-school ideas no longer represent "best practice" in the eyes of most human resources professionals.

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