

3. PROGRESSIVE DISCIPLINE

A central part of the supervisor's job is maintaining discipline. The word *discipline* comes from the word *disciple*: a person who follows the teachings and examples of a respected leader. Like a disciple, the worker who respects the supervisor follows the supervisor's teachings because they are contributing to worthwhile goals. The worker recognizes that standards are needed to help everyone get the job done quickly, safely, and well.

Effective supervisors recognize that the average employee wants to do a good job. They help the employee by making clear the performance standards as described in the previous chapter, by giving clear instructions, by observing and evaluating everyone's work periodically, and by praising a job well done.

Unfortunately, not all supervisors employ this positive approach. Some supervisors with an old-fashioned outlook practice a negative discipline based on threats of punishment. They believe employees will not obey rules unless they are watched closely and forced to obey. They watch for mistakes and rule violations so that violators can be punished.

Often such supervisors get the desired behavior from their workers, but usually only when they are looking. Their workers perform only to keep out of trouble while the boss is around. Since they fear and dislike their boss, they dislike the job, too.

The approach to positive discipline described here is a proven method for dealing with the employee who has fallen below the expected standards for their job. It is designed for use with an employee who presents one or more of these problems:

- Job performance is below performance standards
- Chronically fails to comply with standards of conduct (such as: often late, unexpectedly absent, otherwise fails to take care of business)
- Has an obvious attitudinal problem (quarrelsome, rude, or antagonistic)

The basics of this approach are really fairly simple. It is grounded on the anticipation of achieving results from the employee--improved job performance. However, it is equally well adapted to dealing with employees whose performance does not or cannot improve. **This is a suggested process, not every step must be followed. An employee's behavior may be so unacceptable as to warrant immediate disciplinary action, including termination, without engaging in the preceding steps.** Employee discipline should provide the following:

- a. It should identify deficiencies in work performance in relation to established performance standards.
- b. The unacceptable nature of performance should be communicated clearly to the employee.
- c. All that transpires between the supervisor and employee is documented, recorded for both to see.
- d. An understanding has been arrived at that improvement is sincerely desired, but in its absence, formal disciplinary action will be taken.

DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURE

This method works without complication when conscientiously adhered to. Its value lies in the recognition that proper performance counseling, related to performance standards and well documented, can challenge an employee to realize the employee's potential in a way no other method can. In addition, this step-by-step process takes into account court decisions (such as the Skelly case) which have stated that public agencies must comply with certain due process requirements before taking serious disciplinary action against permanent employees. These requirements include providing written notice of the action, rules or documents verifying the standards violated, and the right to respond. It is important to note that there are sometimes single occurrences of a completely unacceptable action on the part of the employee whose performance has been otherwise satisfactory. Such cases may warrant immediate disciplinary action without following all of these steps. In such a case, contact the Personnel Department and County Counsel for guidance. Any significant deviation from the method described below should conform to these "Skelly" requirements.

The steps outlined here are presented in numerical sequence for the sake of clarity and because many situations will unfold chronologically in this sequence. This manner of presentation should not be interpreted as requiring rigid, unquestioning adherence. Within this general framework, most performance problems can be competently handled. This checklist summarizes the process, which is then detailed step-by-step.

CHECKLIST - POSITIVE DISCIPLINE

This process is designed to provide supervisors with techniques for counseling the employee whose job performance is unsatisfactory. Supervisors may use this checklist to assure that they are following all the steps in the procedure and providing every opportunity for the employee to improve performance. Resolving problems informally will curtail the process from becoming adversarial and possibly counterproductive.

Review the steps outlined in Chapter 3 before using this checklist. A sample checklist follows.



EMPLOYEE'S NAME AND JOB TITLE _____

Step	Description
1A	Informal counseling. Concentrate your energy at this stage! Consider a supervisory referral for EAP or medical exam for suspected substance abuse, medical problems, or situations occurring outside the workplace that may be affecting job performance.
B	Formulate written standard and discuss with employee
C	Repeat discussion as necessary. Write a record of the discussion including the employee's comments and the applicable standard underlined.
2	If improvement still needed, write a rough draft of a Work Performance Memo (WPM). Include: What the standards are, how employee fails to meet them, how the employee may improve, what help will be provided, what disciplinary action might be taken.
3	Discuss the draft WPM with your supervisor or division chief.
4	Discuss WPM with your department head. (Make needed revisions.)
5	Discuss draft WPM with employee. Make Positive Discipline chapter available.
6	Give final WPM to employee as soon as possible.
7	Follow through on improvement schedule and training.
8	Follow-up discussions after WPM is issued, every two or three weeks, to discuss overall progress. Write up the discussions from the meetings.
9	Decide what should be done and give the employee a memo explaining the action (check one): Improvement satisfactory (no further action). Improvement marginal (extend WPM period). Failure to improve (detail names, dates, places). Disciplinary action recommended (work with department management, Personnel, County Counsel). Reprimand. Suspension _____ days. Demotion. Termination. Other _____

SUPERVISOR'S NAME AND JOB TITLE _____