

# Employee Management: Difficult Conversations, Effective Discipline and Proper Documentation

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# How to Hold a Difficult Conversation

-Providing Responsible Feedback

# How to Hold a Difficult Conversation

**Some examples include:**

**Employees may show up late for their scheduled shift.**

**Work productivity may be lacking.**

**People may dress inappropriately and unprofessionally for work.**

**Personal hygiene is sometimes unacceptable or someone may use inappropriate language.**



# How to Hold a Difficult Conversation

**Have you encountered any of these examples?  
They're just samples of the types of behavior that  
cry out for responsible feedback. These steps will  
help you hold difficult conversations when people  
need professional feedback.**



# Steps to Provide Feedback in a Difficult Conversation

- **Seek permission to provide the feedback. Even if you are the employee's boss, start by stating you have some feedback you'd like to share. Ask if it's a good time or if the employee would prefer to select another time and place. (Within reason, of course.)**

# Steps to Provide Feedback in a Difficult Conversation

- Use a soft entry. Don't dive right into the feedback - give the person a chance to brace for potentially embarrassing feedback. Tell the employee that you need to provide feedback that is difficult to share. If you're uncomfortable with your role in the conversation, you might say that, too. Most people are as uncomfortable providing feedback about an individual's personal dress or habits, as the person receiving the feedback.

# Steps to Provide Feedback in a Difficult Conversation

- Often, you are in the feedback role because other employees have complained to you about the habit, behavior, or dress. Do not give in to the temptation to amplify the feedback, or excuse your responsibility for the feedback, by stating that a number of coworkers have complained. This heightens the embarrassment and harms the recovery of the person receiving feedback.

# Steps to Provide Feedback in a Difficult Conversation

- **The best feedback is straightforward and simple. Don't beat around the bush. I am talking with you because this is an issue that needs to be addressed.**



# Steps to Provide Feedback in a Difficult Conversation

- **Tell the person the impact that changing his or her behavior will have from a positive perspective. Tell the employee how choosing to do nothing will affect their career and job.**

# Steps to Provide Feedback in a Difficult Conversation


- **Reach agreement about what the individual will do to change their behavior. Set a due date - tomorrow, in some cases. Set a time frame to review progress in others.**

# Steps to Provide Feedback in a Difficult Conversation

- **Follow-up.** The fact that the problem exists means that backsliding is possible; further clarification may also be necessary. Then, more feedback and possibly, disciplinary action are possible next steps.

# How to Hold a Difficult Conversation

**You can become effective at holding difficult conversations. Practice and these steps will help build your comfort level to hold difficult conversations. After all, a difficult conversation can make the difference between success and failure for a valued employee. Care enough to hold the difficult conversation.**





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# Effective Discipline





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# The Ten Commandments of Effective Discipline



## The First Commandment:

Discipline shall be centralized




## The Second Commandment:

Discipline decisions shall  
be reviewed  
before being implemented



## The Third Commandment:

The employer shall notify employees of conduct that may result in discipline.



## The Fourth Commandment:


The employer shall provide  
industrial due process.

## The Fifth Commandment:

Discipline shall be progressive,  
at least most of the time.

## The Sixth Commandment:

The employer shall  
document the discipline.




The Seventh Commandment:

Discipline shall be fair.



## The Eighth Commandment:

A thorough investigation  
shall precede the decision  
to discipline.




## The Ninth Commandment:

A disciplinary system  
shall be flexible.

## The Tenth Commandment:

Train supervisors on the  
proper administration of discipline.







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# Errors in Disciplining Employees



# Errors in Disciplining Employees

Perhaps the least pleasant task for supervisors and managers is the task of disciplining an employee.


While some staff seem to think that managers take some perverse pleasure in the process, the truth is that it is usually dreaded, and often done in an ineffective way.



# Errors in Disciplining Employees

## Error #1: Discipline as Punishment

Perhaps one of the most prevalent errors is based on the idea that discipline is punishment. The manager that perceives discipline as a punishment process tends to apply negative sanctions, expecting that those negative sanctions will have some sort of positive effect; for example, to eliminate the unwanted behavior simply through the "threat" of additional sanctions.




# Errors in Disciplining Employees

## Error #2: Discipline as an I-You Confrontation

A second error is that some managers see discipline as something done **TO** an employee, not something done with an employee.

Perhaps we must consider a hard reality in the workplace; it's pretty difficult to do anything **TO** an employee without getting wound in trails of paper, documentation, and investment of time. Even then it can be to no avail.



# Errors in Disciplining Employees

## Error #3: Too Late, Too Late


It's probably safe to say that managers do not go hunting for disciplinary problems. Goodness knows, you have enough other things to do then to look for trouble.

Sometimes, though managers are TOO slow to respond to an emerging issue or problem. There are a number of reasons for this:



# Errors in Disciplining Employees

## Error #3: Too Late, Too Late


- tendency to see an emerging problem (e.g. a first instance), as a quirk, a fluke, or accident, and something not worth addressing.
  - desire to have harmony
  - perception that discipline is a cause of disharmony
  - simple dread
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# Errors in Disciplining Employees

## Error #3: Too Late, Too Late

The reason why delay is problematic is that it sends a message that undesirable behavior will be accepted or even not noticed.


Second, delay can have an adverse effect on the manager later, if the problem increases in frequency and intensity so it cannot be ignored.



# Errors in Disciplining Employees

## Error #3: Too Late, Too Late

When a problem is allowed to grow, the manager often will develop an emotional set towards the employee that makes constructive interaction difficult. To be blunt...managers get pissed off at repeated "offenses" even if the manager has done nothing to stop them.





# Errors in Disciplining Employees

## Error #3: Too Late, Too Late

It is very important that inappropriate behavior or actions in the workplace be, at minimum, noted, and the fact communicated with the staff member, right at the first occurrence. This need not be a lengthy difficult discussion, particularly if the event is relatively minor.

The really lengthy, unpleasant discussion tend to occur as a result of not addressing problems early on.

# Errors in Disciplining Employees

## Error #4: A Non-Progressive Approach

Related to the previous point (Error #3) is the issue of progressiveness, or lack of it. Progressive discipline starts with the least possible use of power and disciplinary action, and over time, will involve stronger actions, if the situation continues.




# Errors in Disciplining Employees

## Error #4: A Non-Progressive Approach

Managers who delay disciplinary action tend to wait until action must be taken, when the situation has become so severe that it must be addressed immediately.

Often the manager feels the need to apply harsh sanctions because perhaps the inappropriate behavior has become more extreme.



# Errors in Disciplining Employees

## Error #4: A Non-Progressive Approach

Non-progressive measures (harsh initial action), when applied to a long-time problem that has not been addressed, often seem too harsh by the employee, and on occasion, by their coworkers.

# Errors in Disciplining Employees

## Error #4: A Non-Progressive Approach

A key here is to start with least forceful action as early as possible, unless of course the offense is so severe that it requires immediate harsh action.

# Errors in Disciplining Employees

## Error #5: Missing Root Causes

It is understandable when stressed and frustrated managers/supervisors "lay down the law" to a problem employee.

In some cases, a problem employee may require this kind of approach, particularly if they have the skills to do what is desired, but have not been applying the skills for one reason or another related to motivation.

# Errors in Disciplining Employees

## Error #5: Missing Root Causes

But in many situations, exhortation, threats, or an offer of positive rewards may have little effect on behavior, simply because they do not address the root causes of the problem and leave the employee "on their own" to figure out a solution.



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# Steps in the Discipline Process






# Steps in the Discipline Process

- 1. Take the employee into a private room.** If possible, bring another manager into the room as a witness. Your other manager can take notes of the meeting. This person should not be involved in the disciplinary action.


# Steps in the Discipline Process

- 2. Be clear with the employee about what the undesirable behavior was.** Avoid generalities. The employee needs to be given a description of the offense, as well as the reason why it goes against company policy. Make a point of focusing on the offense rather than the employee.
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# Steps in the Discipline Process

- 3. Explain the negative effects and consequences of the employee's undesirable behavior.** If the offense inconvenienced other employees, then this information should be mentioned. For example, if the employee is consistently tardy or doesn't show up for work and other employees have to fill in, costing additional expense to the company, express this consequence clearly.

# Steps in the Discipline Process

- 4. Give the employee an opportunity to respond to the accusation.** Refrain from interrupting. When the employee is finished, respond accordingly. Ensure that the employee is satisfied with the response, even if it's not what the employee wants to hear.
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# Steps in the Discipline Process

- 5. Establish a clear plan of action for the employee.** Don't leave the meeting without defining an objective. If the offense has been habitual tardiness, then state that you expect the employee to be ready to work by a specific time.

# Steps in the Discipline Process

- 6. Warn the employee about future consequences should the offensive behavior continue.** Follow the punitive procedures as stated in your company policy. Whether the next step is a written warning or termination, the employee needs to know.

# Steps in the Discipline Process

- 7. Ask the employee if there is anything you can do to support the improvement that needs to be made.** The employee needs to feel valued even after being disciplined.

# Steps in the Discipline Process

- 8. Provide a written version of the conversation you just had with the employee.** Ensure that everything mentioned in the meeting is included in the document. Attach the information that the witness wrote, should it be above and beyond what was originally typed up.



# Steps in the Discipline Process

Ask that the employee to read over the document for accuracy. Offer the employee an opportunity to add something to the paperwork before having everyone sign it.



# Steps in the Discipline Process

- **End the meeting on a positive note.**

If you believe that the employee can do a better job, express this view. Find something that you feel is a positive trait, and use that to motivate the employee. Understand that any form of disciplinary action should also be used to motivate the employee.

If the employee leaves the disciplinary meeting feeling deflated, frustrated and resentful, then the negative behavior is less likely to improve.



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# Documenting Discipline




## Proper Documentation


Documentation for discipline must be specific, descriptive and consist of substantive points. These points must be made in respect to the employee's violation, expectations for corrective action and consequences.

Never should your documentation represent your personal or any negative opinions, but should address the behaviors and violations alone. The employee is being disciplined for these violations, not because he or she is a bad person.

## Always:

- Be specific with dates, words, and actions.
  - Make sure your notes are unbiased and without generalities, like "she has a bad temper," or, "he is always late." Make sure dates of violations are included, and there is no verbiage that could be mistaken for an attack on the employee's character.
  - Write clearly and legibly.
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## Always:

- Make sure your documentation is consistent with company policy.
  - Describe the incident causing this action.
  - Describe what will happen if the employee violates the rules.
  - Be clear with expectations, objectives, and timetables.
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## Always:

- Discipline and document in a timely manner while details are fresh.
- Be consistent and don't make exceptions to company policy. Each employee should be treated with equal consideration.
- Discipline after you have thoroughly investigated the situation.


## Always:

- Discuss any disciplinary action with your Human Resources Department.
  - Keep disciplinary procedures private. Do not share information with other employees or others who do not need to know.
  - Have another member of the management staff or a HR representative present when disciplining an employee.
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## Proper Documentation

Consistent discipline with appropriate documentation improves productivity and morale in the workplace. It is necessary to insist on high standards of conduct and productivity with all of your employees. If your employees view you as fair, firm, consistent and competent, they will take pride in their own accomplishments. If not, you will lose good employees and could be plagued with constant disciplinary problems.



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