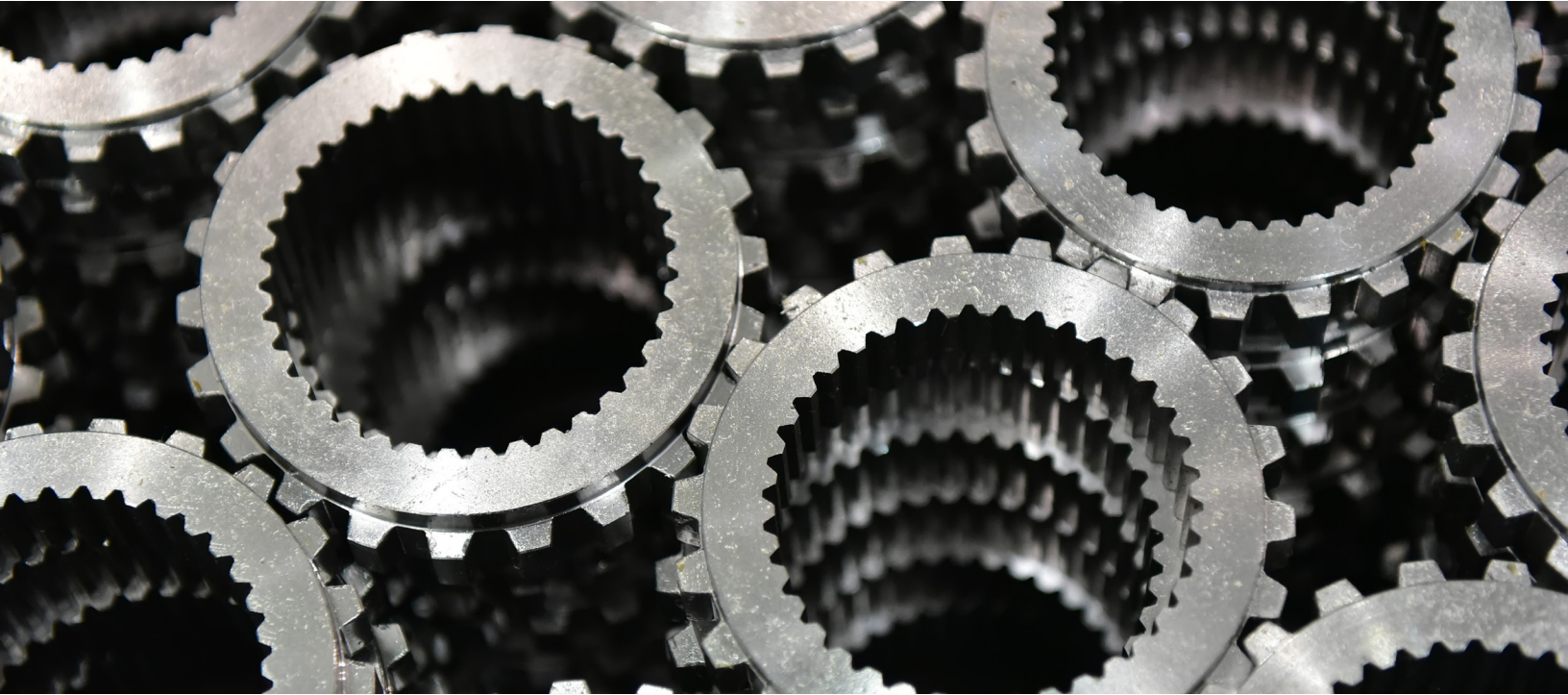


# PROGRESSIVE DISCIPLINE



“Managers try to get their job done by getting work done through people. Leaders get their job done by getting people done through work.”

– Larry Wilson

## EXPECTATION

Some managers wonder if they have realistic expectations for their people. Maybe you too have asked the questions - What should I expect from my people? How should I communicate my expectations? How do I get my people to meet those expectations?

Answering these questions is what your job is all about. The organization and your employees depend on you to

set clear expectations and help your people meet them.

When an employee's performance does not meet your expectations the first remedy you should try is coaching. For more information on coaching methods, see “Coaching” in the Manager's Toolbox. If coaching efforts prove unsuccessful – before you do anything else, contact Employee Relations in Human Resource Services.



**MANAGEMENT HAS A REASONABLE RIGHT TO EXPECT EMPLOYEES TO:**

- Be on time
- Put in a fair day's work
- Work on a regular schedule
- Be physically and mentally able to do their job
- Take direction from supervisors
- Get along with co-workers
- Adjust positively to change
- Know their job
- Follow company rules

**PROGRESSIVE DISCIPLINE PROCESS**

The purpose of the Employee Relations department is to help managers help their employees improve their performance. In some cases this means working through the progressive discipline process.

The stages of progressive discipline are:

1. *Verbal Counseling.* Work with Employee Relations to prepare a document that identifies performance improvement issues. Cite specific examples of inappropriate behavior. Use the document as a discussion tool with your employee. You should establish a realistic time frame in which you can expect to see changes in performance.
2. *Written Counseling.* Use written counseling when the verbal counseling does not result in adequate change. This document should also cite specific examples of inappropriate behavior and should be used as a discussion tool with your employee. Another time frame should be set.
3. *Additional Warnings.* Additional

warnings are also written and should be used in the same manner as verbal and written counseling. However, they should be used to provide the employee with any additional opportunities to improve their performance when appropriate.

4. *Administrative Leave.* Suspension, paid or unpaid, may occur after failed attempts with the three previous steps or as the first step in serious cases. Consult with Employee Relations before suspending any employees.

5. *Termination.* Termination may occur after failed attempts with the four previous steps or as the first step in serious cases. You must consult with Employee Relations

before terminating any employees.

**WHERE DO WE GO WRONG?**

It can be very difficult to deliver negative feedback to employees – especially when it's not something you do on a regular basis. To avoid some of the common mistakes that managers make, keep the following suggestions in mind:

**Have confidence in your employees.** You or someone else in your organization assigned your employees their current responsibilities because you believed they were capable of fulfilling their roles. You owe it to your employees and your organization to give them every opportunity to succeed.





**Communicate.** From an employee's perspective, no news is good news. If you don't know the best way to deliver a difficult message, don't stop communicating all together. Your employee will have no idea that his or her performance is lacking and you will get increasingly frustrated. Without communication, minor issues can quickly turn into major issues. Get Employee Relations to help you prepare for a discussion with your employee and to help you write a supporting document.

**Be clear.** While counseling and Socratic approaches can be effective in other spheres, the most effective approach for performance management is a straightforward approach. Don't leave room for misunderstanding. When you confront

an employee about poor performance be prepared to:

- Identify the problem
- Define your expectations
- Provide solutions

Address performance issues in private. Neither public humiliation nor over-generalized public criticism creates a positive environment for change. Discuss performance issues in your office or find another place that is comfortable and private.

**Document everything.** Legally, if it isn't documented, it didn't happen. Keep a notebook of specific occurrences and record the date, time, and details of the incident. Focus on the behavior of the individual, not on a perceived attitude. For example, "Sam

refused to help customers while he chatted with a co-worker on company time," instead of, "Sam has an unhelpful attitude toward customers." Annual performance appraisals should also contain information on any performance improvement needs. Be honest in your evaluation in Annual Performance Appraisals. No benefit comes to you, the employee or the University if you cloak negative meaning in positive terminology.

If you would like more information on how to document discipline, OIT has a 20-minute video called Documenting Discipline that you can borrow.

**Set a good example.** The best way to communicate your expectations of professionalism is through your personal work ethic. When you exemplify the behaviors that you verbally encourage in your people, the likelihood of problems significantly decreases.

## TO DO LIST

- ✓ If coaching efforts fail, contact Employee Relations right away. They can advise you on the best way to approach your employee, coach you on delivering warnings, and how to prepare the supporting documents.
- ✓ When you talk to your employees about performance issues, be prompt, factual, and specific. Address issues soon after they occur so pressures, tension, and suspicion don't build.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

The goal of the progressive discipline process is to help people improve their performance. The employee, the organization, and you will all benefit from an honest, fair approach to improving performance.