THE EMPLOYEE DISCIPLINE GUIDE

A Practical Guide for Addressing Underperformance in the Workplace

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Why Addressing Underperformance Is So Hard and So Necessary

Municipal leaders are responsible for keeping departments running smoothly while maintaining accountability to staff, the public, and governing bodies. Whether you manage public works, utilities, administration, or public safety, your team's performance directly impacts community trust and service quality.

When an employee falls short of expectations, the effects can be immediate. Team morale can decline, operations may slow down, and small issues can quickly become larger ones. Even so, addressing underperformance is not always straightforward. Leaders often worry about saying the wrong thing, handling the situation inconsistently, or creating unnecessary conflict.

This guide offers a clear and practical approach to addressing discipline. The focus is on correction, not punishment. It is built around transparency, documentation, and a fair, consistent process that protects both the employee and the department.

The strategies in this guide reflect the same systems that TrackIT helps municipal agencies put in place. These workflows bring structure and peace of mind to one of the most challenging responsibilities of leadership.

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The Progressive Discipline Framework

Progressive Discipline is a process designed to help employees understand where they are falling short and what they can do to improve. This structured approach provides a foundation for fairness and consistency across your department or agency.

1. Verbal Coaching: Start with a documented conversation. Describe the behavior or performance issue clearly, explain its impact, and agree on the next steps for improvement. Although informal, this conversation should be logged with specific details.

2. Written Warning: If the issue continues, move to a formal written warning. This should include a performance improvement plan with specific, measurable goals and a realistic timeline. Communicate what is expected and what may happen if improvement does not occur.

3**. Final Warning:** If progress is still not made, issue a final warning. Emphasize the seriousness of the situation and clearly outline this as the final opportunity for correction. Include a timeframe for when performance will be reviewed again.

4. Separation: If performance does not improve after the final warning, proceed with termination. Ensure that all prior documentation is in order and follow your organization's HR protocols to protect all parties involved.

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Coaching Scripts and Documentation Tips

Knowing what to say can make a difficult conversation more productive. Here are examples of how to approach these moments, along with best practices for documenting them.

• **First-Time Issue:** “I’ve noticed a few issues with how tasks are being completed. I understand the workload can be demanding at times. Still, accuracy and follow-through are important for the success of the team. Let’s talk about how we can address this together.”

• **Recurring Problem:** “We have talked about this before, and unfortunately, the issue is still happening. I need to document this and outline a plan so we can work toward improvement.”

• **Final Warning:** “We have addressed this more than once, and this is now a formal warning. We need to see improvement within the next 30 days, or we may need to move forward with additional action.”

Tips for Documentation:
• Write notes immediately after conversations while details are still clear
• Focus on specific behaviors and dates rather than feelings or assumptions
• Avoid emotional or vague language
• Store documentation in one secure, centralized location

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Common Pitfalls to Avoid

Even experienced leaders can find it challenging to manage discipline effectively. Here are some of the most common mistakes to look out for, along with tips to help you avoid them:

• Acting inconsistently with different employees in similar situations

• Giving feedback that is too vague to be actionable

• Starting the process but failing to follow through with documentation

• Forgetting to document conversations or storing notes in scattered places

• Waiting too long to address ongoing problems, which often makes the issue worse

Being proactive, consistent, and organized helps create a more fair and supportive environment. This benefits both your employees and your leadership team.

Your Next Step

Handling discipline in a busy municipal department is never simple. With competing priorities, public expectations, and limited resources, it can be difficult to stay consistent. But with the right structure in place, managing employee performance becomes more fair, more organized, and easier to follow through.

TrackIT gives supervisors and department leaders a straightforward way to document performance, coaching conversations, and disciplinary steps. Everything is stored securely in one place, so you always have the information you need to support your team and your decisions.

If you are looking for a system that helps reinforce accountability without adding more to your workload, we invite you to learn more at:

https://trackitpm.com/municipalities/

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