
The Mathis Group's

Messenger

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Ten Laws for Managing Terminations

By Dr. Keith Mathis

This month we are continuing with laws two through five on how to manage terminations. These laws will help ease the tension associated with terminations and assure that the proper guidelines were followed.

2. When possible, try not to terminate on a Friday or holiday.

When a person is terminated on Friday or just before a holiday, the timing can increase the sense of desperation and cause people to overreact. In some cases, the timing and its effect lead the individual to create disturbances in the workplace during the next week. The following are things to keep in mind concerning terminations just before holidays or on Fridays.

Terminating on holidays or on Fridays breeds desperation.

Terminating a person on a holiday or a Friday allows the individual time to reminisce about his or her loss of income. Questions may arise about how he or she will pay for the basics such as the house note, the children's college, the car, or health insurance.

This thinking, combined with no opportunity to take action because it is a weekend or holiday, can lead to desperation. Desperation can drive people to destructive behavior such as excessive drinking or even attempting suicide.

Terminating them on a holiday or Friday prevents them from moving forward.

When you terminate on a day other than Friday or a holiday, it allows the person the opportunity to take action. He or she can begin looking for another job, filing for unemployment, etc.

Being terminated during the middle of the week allows the person a workable timeframe to make adjustments and begin the process of looking for a job. Action reduces the employee's

desperation, and it increases a feeling of accomplishment. Taking action helps to support the individual's feeling of self-worth.

3. Make sure all coaching and counseling sessions have been documented.

Coaching and counseling sessions should be used as a normal part of the discipline process of any employee. The sessions will increase the likelihood the person will change.

If they do not change, a record of what you have done shows you have gone the extra mile in giving employees opportunities to change. It is helpful to keep copies of the agenda of each meeting and the notes you took at each coaching session.

Coaching and counseling are positive ways to motivate employees. Only in extreme cases would an employee be terminated without being coached or taken through progressive discipline. Some of these cases might be violence, stealing, sexual harassment, or discrimination. In any of these cases, we must make sure we do a thorough investigation prior to termination. Agendas for the meeting should have the following information recorded on them:

- Date
- Time
- The person's name
- Detailed information to be discussed
- Resources you desire the employee to read or use
- Barriers the employee is experiencing
- Ways supervisors can help
- Areas in which the employee is making progress
- Areas of concern needing continued attention
- New assignment of resources including books, tapes, etc.
- Time and date of next meeting

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4. Verify that all performance standards and rules were discussed prior to using any type of discipline.

Discussing performance standards is a normal part of discipline. It is important to document the date and time when a particular standard was discussed.

Discussing company standards and policies will serve to reinforce them to the employee, and it will remove any ambiguity from the discipline process. All discipline must be clearly explained, detailed, and documented for the employee.

Good standards are a must in order to impact the organization in the fastest period of time.

“If a standard is to be a useful guide for the job performer, it must be specific, realistic, and sensitive to change; fit the requirements of the observable job; and describe the terms of job outputs” (Connellan, T., 1978, Harper & Row, How To Improve Human Performance, p.70).

You will find it helpful to show copies of the job description and the policies and procedures that have been broken. These copies can be handed to the employee with the most important areas highlighted for his or her attention. This method can be very effective in showing the employee the seriousness of the situation. These handouts should be distributed during progressive discipline.

5. Point out the exact performance that brought about the termination.

Going over the reasons for the termination with the employee reinforces that you have grounds for no longer retaining the worker.

Detail what actions the employee committed.

Don't assume employees will recall all of your issues during this meeting. Explain the behavior thoroughly. This explanation is a courtesy, and in some instances, it can also prevent potential lawsuits.

Don't fix the blame, fix the problem.
Keith S. Pennington

Explain what policy, rules, or standards were violated.

When a policy is violated, you should give the employee copies of every disciplinary action that was taken and the process that led to the termination.

In some cases, creating a termination letter giving an overview of all the issues and actions which led up to this event is beneficial.

Next month we will continue with the next laws for managing terminations.

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