SUPERVISORS GUIDE TO IMPROVED EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE
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## Appendix

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SUPERVISORS GUIDE TO IMPROVED EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE

INTRODUCTION

An important part of a supervisor’s responsibility is obtaining effective job performance from their employees. The employees in a department look to their supervisor for direction and leadership. The supervisor provides this by identifying performance and conduct expectations and providing encouragement, development opportunities, performance evaluations, coaching and counseling, reward and discipline, as necessary.

Supervisors are responsible for instructing, coaching and counseling employees in specific areas to meet performance standards and comply with rules of conduct. If this is properly done and problems are recognized and solved early, the need for disciplinary action should be reduced. Effective discipline is the result of constructive leadership exercised within the framework of clear and consistent policies and direction. It is inseparable from other aspects of supervision and employee relations.

Handling performance issues well is a matter of using good judgment and common sense within the context of RHIT policies and procedures. The information that follows is meant to inform you in following procedures for improving and/or correcting employee performance through the application of coaching, counseling, progressive discipline and performance appraisals.

Policies from the Faculty and Staff Handbooks and sample forms are available in the Appendix to this guide.

At the onset, a supervisor should communicate the concept that satisfactory performance is a minimal expectation. Techniques of non-disciplinary action, such as coaching and counseling, as well as progressive discipline should be used to immediately address performance deficiencies or incidents of misconduct. The first step in guiding an employee with conduct or performance issues will be coaching and counseling sessions and issuance of a Performance Improvement Plan. Coaching, counseling and a Performance Improvement Plan all occur before the disciplinary process is initiated. When violations of policies or performance deficiencies occur, it is the supervisor’s responsibility to recognize these and begin corrective action. If such misconduct or performance deficiencies go unchecked, problems may escalate and become more difficult to handle. In addition, the solution will probably be more difficult and time consuming to administer. The supervisor should address all issues as early as possible using the primary tools outlined in the non-disciplinary and disciplinary processes described in this guide.
I. NON-DISCIPLINARY PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

COACHING
As it relates to performance management, coaching is a process that is used primarily to teach employees certain tasks/responsibilities. Coaching is a method especially useful in assisting employees to address complex problems and/or attain significant goals in a highly individualized fashion. Coaching is a collaborative process, where a supervisor and employee continually set short and long term performance goals; listen actively to each other during coaching sessions; and ask questions, share views, and negotiate approaches for further development. Coaching is not disciplinary, and occurs BEFORE performance problems occur.

In order to be an effective coach (supervisor) and mentor to your employees:

- Lead by example.
  - You can’t expect your employees to be present, on time and hit deadlines, if you don’t.
- Set realistic expectations.
  - Disappointment is as much about expectations as anything. Setting realistic expectations can help prevent underperforming employee situations.
- Communicate well and often.
- Give one-on-one feedback, frequently.
- Give clear directions.
  - No directions or unclear directions are the number one reasons that teams fail.
- Be approachable.
  - You hope that your employees are not afraid to come to you directly when they have issues (especially with you).
- Be clear about roles and responsibilities.
  - Supervisors would have fewer “difficult people” if roles and responsibilities were made clearer. You know that roles and responsibilities are unclear when you hear such comments as:
    “I thought I was supposed to do that.”
    “We both did that?”
    “Nobody did that?”
- Create a climate of openness, mutuality and trust.
  - Some degree of trust and openness is essential. If the organization or the department in which the subordinate works is full of tension and mistrust, coaching won’t be effective.
- Know how to deal with conflict.
  - Some people avoid conflict. When you avoid conflict, it tends to get worse. On the other hand, others seem to enjoy “a good fight.” Both extremes of dealing with conflict are to be avoided.
- Understand expressed and wanted control.
  - People with a high need for wanted control are comfortable when somebody else tells them what to do.
  - Conversely, people who have a high need for expressed control are likely to attempt to exert control and influence others.
– If both parties (supervisor and employee) have a high need to control, then there may be conflict.

Preparation is the key to coaching success. A prepared supervisor has written a discussion plan beforehand identifying the things that need to be covered during the coaching session. In the coaching session both supervisor and employee agree to and list areas where results were achieved or exceeded; areas where results did not meet expectations; action plans for remedying problems where desired results did not occur; and additional short and long term performance goals.

Follow up should occur on a regular basis. Good supervisors continually reinforce positive performance results and address issues arising when goals are not reached.

The difference between coaching and counseling:

COACHING occurs when an employee does not know how to do a task or assignment. Coaching takes place BEFORE problems occur.

COUNSELING occurs when an employee knows how to do the assignment but is not able or willing to do it.

**COUNSELING**

Counseling forces an employee to face the issues with their performance or behavior and gives them an opportunity to change. This is an opportunity to reinforce the employee’s accountability for rectifying performance deficiencies or conduct issues.

The counseling session is a meeting held between the supervisor and employee to discuss either specific general work performance areas in need of improvement or a violation of policies or procedures. Frequently, problems that are recognized early can be resolved by counseling. Privacy and sufficient time devoted to the meeting are essential. It is generally helpful to prepare for the counseling session by developing a written outline of specific problem areas with corresponding suggestions/directives for improvement.

A positive approach to the discussion, coupled with constructive counseling, serve as key elements to the counseling session. Documentation of the session on the appropriate counseling form or kept in supervisory notes is strongly urged (or, a Memo of Understanding). This provides a basis for follow-up at future meetings with the employee, and gives you a source of documentation if the problem persists.

**When Counseling Is Used**

Sometimes coaching reveals attitude problems, fears or other factors that interfere with the willingness to do one's job. When such barriers to motivation are identified, supervisors shift into a counseling mode to resolve them. Counseling is the process of guiding an employee in a constructive direction. It addresses the “won’t do” instead of “can’t do”. Counseling is people oriented and focuses on past behaviors.
It is important to remember that although counseling sessions precede written warnings and official disciplinary action(s), it is not in and of itself considered disciplinary. Some supervisors feel that because a topic has been mentioned in a conversation with the employee at some time, counseling has occurred. However, a casual conversation, combined with other topics, may not have the desired impact on the employee. Counseling is a private discussion with a closed door and limited interruptions. It is meant to impress upon the employee the seriousness of your expectations, and permit the exchange of information that is critical to the employee’s success. The situation should be reviewed with the Office of Human Resources prior to proceeding with the meeting.

If the employee does not improve, or the problem is not corrected following counseling, it may be necessary to move to progressive discipline. If an employee has been coached and counseled with no improvement, it may be appropriate to move on to progressive disciplinary procedures.

**The Counseling Session**

1. Identify the problem and be able to vocalize the issue in terms of its impact on the department or organization.
2. Prepare for the counseling session in advance by setting a time and place with the employee, in private.
3. Have your information (observations) organized prior to the meeting.
4. Open the session by telling the employee it is a “counseling session”.
5. Put the employee at ease.
6. Focus on the actual behavior. Get the employee's agreement on what they think is causing the performance or behavior issue.
7. Explain why it is important to the Institute for the employee to perform well.
8. Describe the areas of performance that the employee must improve. As much as possible, describe desired performance in terms of results that are to be achieved. Explain what happens to the department or the Institute when the employee does not perform well. Describe what good performance looks like, providing concrete examples of good work, if possible.
9. Ask for the employee's view on why their performance is not currently meeting standards. Does the employee believe there is a problem?
10. Discuss possible solutions. What does the employee propose to do to solve the problem? Get the employee to develop steps to solve the problem to create a sense of ownership in the solution. Suspend the session if the employee needs more time to develop a plan. If the employee cannot develop a plan, develop one for the employee. Once you and the employee agree on a plan and results, document it in the Performance Improvement Plan.
11. If the employee does not have a plan or is unwilling to discuss it, you lay out a plan and encourage suggestions and questions. If the employee makes suggestions, include one or more in the plan, if possible. Then, ask them if they’ll be ready to commit to the plan.
12. If the employee won't commit, send the employee home to think it over. Not committing to improve a performance problem is the same as quitting. If the employee won't commit, bring in a high level manager or human resources professional to talk with the employee.
If the employee still won't commit—which rarely happens, termination may be the only option.

13. Agree to a written action plan containing specific goals and timetables for meeting those goals (Performance Improvement Plan - PIP).
14. Ask if there’s anything you can help out with. Unless the employee wants you to take responsibility, when it is feasible, agree to provide help.
15. Have the employee orally commit to the Performance Improvement Plan and provide them with a copy while retaining another copy as documentation of the meeting.
16. Follow up on performance based on the goals stated in the Performance Improvement Plan. Provide feedback on how the employee is doing. Continue to offer suggestions to improve performance. Praise instances where performance has improved.

A calm and thoughtful approach will keep the supervisor in control of the situation and hopefully allow the employee to move positively towards a productive goal without causing resentment or embarrassment.

II. PROGRESSIVE DISCIPLINE

Progressive discipline is a generally accepted supervisory practice that establishes penalties of increasing severity for repeated infractions or work performance issues. Done correctly, it provides a fair, consistent method of addressing unsatisfactory performance or inappropriate behavior. Progressive discipline offers the employee the opportunity to correct unacceptable behavior or performance deficiencies before being discharged. Disciplinary action will normally begin at the lowest step in the progressive discipline process, but may be advanced depending on the seriousness of the performance issue or infraction. Some cases of misconduct are so severe that you may skip one or more of the steps in the progressive discipline process (See appendix for Major Acts of Misconduct).

It is never appropriate to terminate an employee on the spot. It is important to follow proper procedure when taking action. An employee may be placed on administrative leave pending investigation into serious infractions or allegations. The decision to place an employee on a paid/unpaid leave of absence is usually made at the Area Vice President level, after consultation with the Director of Human Resources.

Types of Discipline

The goal of progressive discipline is to give the employee a chance to correct errors or work performance issues at the first opportunity possible. The process gradually increases the severity of the corrective action and corresponding disciplinary penalty if the employee fails to improve. The process of progressive discipline may include the following actions:

• Written warning
• Suspension
• Dismissal

An important point to remember about progressive discipline is that it is intended to be corrective, rather than punitive. Therefore, as a general rule, the minimum disciplinary action should be the first step in the corrective action process. However please note that if the infraction is severe enough the penalty can be termination. In these types of cases the goal of discipline is
to remove a staff member who has been involved in conduct that is too egregious to warrant a second chance.

**When Progressive Discipline is Used**

Supervisors may need to implement the progressive discipline process for the following reasons:

- violation of RHIT policies or procedures;
- major acts of misconduct;
- less than satisfactory job performance.

The expectation is that the problem will be remedied after initial disciplinary action has been taken. The type of corrective action taken in a specific situation depends upon many variables, including:

- the seriousness of the offense committed or the job performance deficiency and the circumstances under which it occurred;
- the seriousness of the offense or deficiency in terms of the employee’s duties and responsibilities, level in the organization, and possible impact on coworkers;
- the effect of the offense or deficiency on the efficient operations of the department or Institute;
- the previous measures taken to correct the same problem, if this is a “repeated” offense or occasion of performance deficiency;
- the employee’s explanation of her/his actions regarding the offense or deficiency;
- the type of corrective action taken for similar offenses or deficiencies;
- the employee’s work history.

A supervisor may implement non-disciplinary corrective actions, such as coaching and counseling, as necessary. Corrective actions that rise to the level of discipline are taken to the Director of Human Resources, in consultation with the Department Head/Director and Area Vice President. Disciplinary action is usually imposed as a result of a supervisor’s recommendation or at the conclusion of an administrative investigation into an employee’s alleged wrongdoing.

While properly implementing progressive discipline can be time consuming it has critical implications in the success and defense of your actions as a supervisor. Therefore, it is important for you to thoroughly understand and practice these concepts when disciplining employees.
CORRECTIVE ACTION PROCEDURE

Insubordination and Direct Orders

Every employee has an obligation to comply with reasonable and proper work-related directives from a supervisor. Under ordinary circumstances a supervisor doesn’t need to issue a direct order to an employee to ensure that the employee performs assigned work. Employees usually perform everyday work tasks as a matter of routine and willingly agree to any special supervisory requests that may be necessary. However, there may be times when an employee balks at performing some task (or avoids it) or defies the supervisor and refuses to follow the supervisor’s directive. When this occurs, the employee’s conduct may be considered insubordinate in nature and may be cause for disciplinary action.

In a situation like this, the most immediate concern of the supervisor is to restore order in the workplace and maintain his/her effectiveness. The supervisor does so by issuing a direct order.

The required elements of a “direct order” are:

- the supervisor must order the employee to do a task;
- the employee must understand what s/he is being asked to do;
- the employee must understand that s/he is being given a direct order to perform a task and that refusal will result in discipline;
- the employee must refuse to comply;
- the supervisor should have a second supervisor or a manager witness the “direct order”;
- The supervisor making the order must have the authority to do so.

How to Give a Direct Order

If a supervisor requests an employee to perform certain duties (or work overtime, e.g.) and the employee refuses, the supervisor should make certain the employee has a clear understanding of the supervisor’s request. If the employee still refuses to perform the task or request, the supervisor should summon a second supervisor or manager, if either is available, to witness the “direct order”. The supervisor should then clearly indicate to the employee that they are issuing a direct order to (identify the task or request) and ask the employee if they are going to perform the task. At anytime during the conversation that the employee agrees to perform the task or request, then the situation is considered resolved. However, if the employee, after clear explanation of the request continues to refuse to perform the task or request, then the employee needs to be advised that: “by refusing to follow a direct order, you are being insubordinate and are therefore, subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

The employee may comply at this point, in which case the situation is considered resolved. However, if the employee still refuses, s/he will usually be suspended, pending the outcome of an investigation of the act of insubordination/refusal to follow a direct order.
**Written Warning (communication)**

The supervisor may have the Director of Human Resources and/or an Ombudsman or member of the Employee Relations Committee present during the corrective action process; one of the aforementioned must be present.

A written warning is used if the offense is serious enough to warrant discipline or when counseling has not corrected the employee’s poor performance or behavior. Counseling is non-disciplinary and tells the employee what is expected of him/her; a written warning restates those expectations but also tells the employee the consequences for failing to meet them. It is a severe measure for poor conduct or performance deficiencies and also includes the consequences of failure to correct such conduct/deficiency.

Verbal or written warnings are the most commonly used disciplinary actions in most organizations. It can be the result of observing a policy or rule violation or an investigation into allegations of harassment or other conduct issues.

A written warning should be as concise as possible and usually includes the following elements:

- the violation, infraction or performance deficiency
- the required change in performance or behavior expected from the employee
- specific consequences or actions that may be taken
- a statement that indicates a copy of the warning will be placed in the employee’s personnel file.

A written warning requires that the matter be fully discussed with the employee. When meeting with the employee to issue the written warning, the employee is asked to sign and date the document, to acknowledge receipt. If the employee refuses to sign, note on the warning “This written warning was given to and discussed with the employee, who refused to sign it” and have one of the others (Director of HR, Ombudsman, Employee Relations representative) sign as a witness that the discussion took place. Corrective action will be active for a period of one (1) year from the time the first step was initiated. After a period of one (1) year, in the event of a positive resolution and continued active employment, the corrective action will be considered concluded.

**Suspension**

Suspending an employee is to be done only by the Director of Human Resources in consultation with the Department Head/Director and the Area Vice President. A suspension may occur to allow a thorough investigation of an alleged violation or as the next step in progressive discipline when performance or conduct has not suitably improved. For an investigation, the employee will be suspended until the investigation is complete; for performance/conduct, the employee will be suspended for one day without pay.

A suspension is the most serious action that can be taken prior to the termination of an employee. Suspension imposes a penalty on the employee by depriving the employee of pay during the
suspension period. Occasionally it will be deemed to be in the best interests of the employer to impose an “on-paper” suspension. In such a situation, the employee who has been disciplined continues to work his/her regular schedule for the usual wages, but the record reflects a suspension for progressive discipline purposes. This type of discipline carries the same weight as a suspension without pay. It is usually imposed when a staffing shortage would be exacerbated by the suspended employee’s absence from the workplace.

Suspension is most often imposed for a specific and serious violation of policies and not because of an employee’s continued poor work performance. A suspension may be warranted for either a first offense, if it is sufficiently serious, or for a repeated violation after one (or more) written warnings have been issued.

**Termination**

Immediate termination is possible for any act deemed by the Institute to be a major act of misconduct. Termination is to be done only by the Director of Human Resources in consultation with the Department Head/Director and Area Vice President. Termination is the last step in the disciplinary process and is used after all other remedial measures have been exhausted. Again, in certain circumstances, termination is used for certain “major acts of misconduct”. Termination will be considered only after a thorough investigation of the alleged violation or a thorough review of long-term, continued, documented, performance deficiencies. A sample letter of termination is included in the appendix.

**The Disciplinary Meeting**

The meeting is conducted by the Director of Human Resource and the direct supervisor.

During the meeting:

- Get to the point and clearly state the conduct issue or performance deficiency;
- describe the evidence supporting the allegations;
- describe the discipline being considered;
- ask the employee for his/her side of the story and any comments concerning what discipline, if any, is warranted; and
- document the process.

If you are terminating an employee, do it on Monday at the beginning or end of the employee’s shift. This will allow the employee the remainder of the week to look for other employment, file for unemployment, etc. Never terminate an employee on Friday as they will not have access to act on other employment and may spend the weekend dwelling on their termination.

When terminating, place yourself closest to the exit, so that if necessary, you can get out and away, should the employee become hostile or violent.

- Be empathetic;
• HR will advise the employee regarding benefits continuation/discontinuation (COBRA) and their final paycheck and any additional payouts (vacation);
• Collect keys and any other company property
• Don’t apologize. If your decision is the right one, there is no need to apologize for it.
III. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT