



Using Progressive Discipline to Positively Guide

The word 'discipline' normally carries a negative connotation, but it doesn't have to. It's derived from the root word 'disciple', but disciple has a non-religious meaning: 'follower or student.' Using that definition, a supervisor that 'disciplines' an employee is acting in a positive way to guide the employee towards better workplace performance.

To help employees improve, an employer should adopt (and a supervisor should use) a progressive (and positive) disciplinary process. The goal of the process should be to remove distractions (*e.g., unwanted actions/behaviors*), empower employees to better meet desired goals/outcomes, and create an environment with learning opportunities.

It's important to involve management and/or human resources personnel during disciplinary meetings to serve a variety of roles including assisting with facilitating, mediation, or to serve as a witness during the meeting. Supervisors and managers should be properly trained in documentation of all disciplinary issues.

Below are some suggested progressive disciplinary steps.

Step 1 - Verbal Warnings: Supervisors may issue verbal warnings to employees who commit minor infractions or violations of the safety rules or safe work practices.

Step 2 - Written Warnings: Supervisors may issue written warnings for the following:

- Repeated minor violations of safety rules or procedures.
- Single serious violations of a rule or procedure that could have potentially resulted in injury to themselves or another employee or could have caused property damage.
- Activities that could potentially result in injury or property damage.
- Failure to follow organizational policies or procedures.

Step 3 - Disciplinary Leave: Disciplinary leave (suspension) may be recommended because of the above reasons as well as the following:

- A single serious violation of a rule or procedure that results in injury to an employee or property damage.
- Repeated violations or non-conformance to safety rules/procedures.

Step 4 - Termination: Recommendation of termination of any employee for repeated serious violations of the above circumstances may be made.

You should share your organization's employment expectations, based on your policies and procedures, with your employees to promote individual accountability. Of course, if you must go on a progressive disciplinary journey, you should document the complete story through appropriate, accurate, and timely documentation. Your organization's HR, Legal and/or Compliance team(s) can help along the way.

Additional Resources

- [The Traditional Progressive Discipline Paradigm \(shrm.org\)](http://shrm.org)
- [Progressive Discipline: Steps for Creating Workplace Policy | Indeed.com](http://Indeed.com)
- [Call Before You Fire - TML \(tmlirp.org\)](http://tmlirp.org)
- [TMLIRP Media Library](#)
 - The Power of Positive Discipline, Disk #254
 - After All, You're the Supervisor, Disk #859