Dealing With Employee Discipline Issues   By: Maria L. Novak

Disciplining employees is not something most managers look forward to doing. The ability to successfully handle employee discipline in a timely and professional manner, however, is crucial for any business.   Below are four key ways to address issues of employee discipline:

1.) Set up clear-cut expectations from the beginning. Provide Job Descriptions that are signed by your staff. When employees know their roles as well as what is (and is not) expected of them, it becomes easier for them to perform well and succeed. In addition, it's also easier for you to judge when expectations are not being met, and to use the guidelines as a reminder.

2.) Pay attention to first-time infractions, but don't obsess over them. People make mistakes. Things happen. Often people know they've done wrong, and can self-correct or benefit from sympathetic yet helpful advice. If the mistake is big or you know it requires immediate attention, step in privately and acknowledge the error. Cool off so you can be objective and then ask questions. What actually happened? What led to this decision? What does the employee think can be done to avoid this result in the future? Giving the employee input and the opportunity to own and address his or her mistake can often get you further than simply yelling or punishing.

Keep in mind that any infraction, whether a first time infraction or a final Discipline SHOULD be documented. Even if an employee is verbally counseled, a recap of the conversation that transpired should be documented. It is essential to create and keep a good record of what steps have been taken in the event that the information needs to be accessed in the future.

It is also a good idea to have your disciplinary procedures written up in your Employee Handbook.

3.) Take time to address the good as well as the bad. If the only time your employees hear from you is when something is wrong, well, there's something wrong. Your employees should be recognized for the work they do that is good as well as for ideas or procedures they suggest. Offer praise in addition to addressing problem areas. Encourage your staff to suggest improvements and ideas.

4.) Teach. Show your employees that problems are obstacles, not necessarily roadblocks. Work with them to solve difficult issues so that they can be comfortable doing so on their own at some point. Be a mentor and model the behavior and success strategies you'd like to see them using.

Performance and behavioral issues in your staff members rarely get better if ignored. In fact, they often get worse, creating a bigger problem for you to address in the future. Setting up a well-defined, clearly paved pathway toward success can help employees start off on the right foot. Knowing how and when to address problems can help you navigate when things don't go so smoothly.

For more information on HR practices and Employee Handbooks, please contact Maria Novak at 610-405-0633 or email MariaNovak001@yahoo.com