

CONTENTS

REDEFINING "DISCIPLINE"	11
HOW TO IDENTIFY A PERFORMANCE PROBLEM	15
ANALYZING THE SEVERITY OF THE PROBLEM	19
CONDUCTING THE PROBLEM-SOLVING DISCUSSION	25
DOCUMENTING THE PROBLEM ... <i>AND</i> THE DISCUSSION	35
FOLLOWING WITH FOLLOW UP	39
TIPS FOR ENCOURAGING GOOD PERFORMANCE	43
CLOSING THOUGHTS	51

*Little values comes out of
the common belief
that discipline and punishment
go hand-in-hand.*

REDEFINING “DISCIPLINE”

When you hear the word “discipline,” do you think of punishment ... pain ... something you do to others for misbehavior? Most people do. Let’s face it – there’s a lot of negative baggage associated with that term! And it probably started back in childhood.

Do you remember being on the receiving end of some form of “discipline” doled-out by a relative, a teacher, a principal, an athletic coach, or some other person who had authority over you? Were you ever “grounded”? Ever “benched”? Maybe even “suspended”? It hurt! It was humiliating! Truth be told, it wasn’t pleasant for those parents, teachers, or coaches either. And while nobody liked it, it was (and still is) a common *modus operandi*.

The Traditional Approach

According to traditional (“old school”) thinking, punishment is the most direct way to deal with performance problems. The theory is simple: If you inflict enough pain on those who misbehave, you’ll eventually get their attention and they’ll start doing what you want them to. And the message is quite clear: “Since you screwed up, I’m going to do something bad to you. And if you don’t get better, you’re gonna get something even worse!”

While both the theory and message may work in some life situations, they tend to backfire when applied to adults on the job. Why? Because they’re based upon the fallacy that people will respond progressively better when treated progressively worse. Think about that for a moment. It’s just not realistic! Fact is, punishment typically produces feelings of rejection, frustration and humiliation. Rather than motivating employees to become better performers, it’s more likely to teach them that they should merely avoid getting caught! Some “retire on the job” and do as little as they can get away with. Worse yet, others decide to “get even” and do things intended to cause problems for you, your team, and your entire organization.

So, punishing employees can actually make things worse – by creating a whole new set of problems that you and others must deal with. And that's not all!

Addressing performance problems is also where you and your organization face some huge risks and liabilities if not handled properly. Some of these risks are legal (i.e., lawsuits). Others involve employee morale, productivity, and your organization's reputation. And all of this affects the level of trust that you enjoy (or miss out on) with your people. That's why punishment needs to be seen (and used) as a last resort rather than a primary strategy.

But, You're Only Human

If it hasn't happened yet, sooner or later it will: you'll be faced with an employee who does something disruptive, violates a rule, or just fails to get the job done. He or she has a performance problem. And like it or not, you must deal with it.

Of course, it's irritating! You already have plenty on your plate. Now this new problem hits you in the gut like a "Maalox moment" – and it hurts. It's tempting, at first, to want to take that pain and transfer it to the source ... to lash out, in a hurtful and punishing way, at the person who caused the problem. But, while doing so may actually produce some short-term results (not to mention satisfying any initial desires for retribution on your part), such a punitive response typically has long-term negative consequences on a working relationship. That makes it a lousy option.

Besides, you really *DO* care about being fair and dealing with people appropriately. You also know that other people will probably hear about any unfair treatment (real or just perceived) on your part. So, now you face another temptation. Out of concern for maintaining relationships at all costs and not being labeled "the heavy," you're tempted to let the issue slide. Failing to act, however, sends the message that meeting performance standards isn't really that important. Pretty soon, the problem spreads – overlapping into

other areas. As the problems mount, so does your misery. Eventually, *your* job is in jeopardy. And that's an even *worse* option!

A Better Way

When facing employee performance problems, leaders often feel caught in "either/or" situations – having to choose between two equally important end states:

Get Results ***OR*** Maintain Relationships.

But you don't have to sacrifice one for the other. Performance results and positive relationships are not mutually exclusive ... you *can* achieve both! How? By conducting effective problem-solving discussions with employees – ones that not only engage people to meet their job responsibilities, but also pass the test of fair and consistent treatment.

Here's one you can take to the bank: While punishment should be avoided, *discipline doesn't need to be*. Discipline should be about helping employees understand what's expected of them, solving problems, achieving desired levels of performance, and getting results.

You see, discipline isn't an action that you – the person with authority – must take against employees for misbehavior. Instead, it's a process to help people make good choices about working together safely, ethically, and productively. By focusing on problem solving and treating employees as "adults," you can avoid much of the pain and negativity that typically exists. It's a better and less stressful approach – for your employees and for YOU!

You maintain good discipline when you give employees meaningful responsibilities and then hold them accountable. When people perform well, they deserve credit for their good work. But when they don't perform as expected, you must remind them of their responsibilities and provide them with the opportunity to correct the problem. Doing these things consistently not only

produces desired results, it also builds good working relationships. People know what to expect, and trust is easier to maintain.

A sports team that plays with discipline is a team that executes well. A person with a disciplined approach to saving for the future is considered wise and mature. These perspectives show us that discipline is more than people just complying with rules and expectations ... *or else!* It's positive because it's based upon commitment – people choosing to do what's right because *they* believe in it and *they* are involved in the process.

Yes, discipline can (and should) be a positive process that produces positive results. And when it comes to addressing performance problems, the way you *get* those results is by applying this time-tested, five-step model (explained, in detail, on the pages that follow):

POSITIVE DISCIPLINE®

Performance Improvement Process

IDENTIFY *the problem*

ANALYZE *the severity*

DISCUSS *the issue*

DOCUMENT *the discussion*

FOLLOW UP *on the correction*