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Personnel Notes

"Corrective Counseling & Terminations" by Linda Gregurek

A termination is probably the most unpleasant task a supervisor and/or manager will have to perform. However, terminations should not be a total surprise to your employee if you provide them with the proper counseling and constructive criticism. Counseling an employee gives them the opportunity to improve on their situation, as well as show them your consistency in practices, concerns and fair play. As the employer, it also gives you an opportunity to build your documentation of a behavior problem and how it was handled in the event a termination ends up in litigation. This article will focus on the more common corrective counseling/termination procedures that can be used by management.

VERBAL WARNING OR COUNSELING SESSION

Establishing straightforward communication from the beginning of a corrective situation is fundamental for creating a constructive environment that doesn't just focus on the negative, but provides suggestions for improvement and room to correct problems. Keep the following tips in mind to facilitate an effective corrective counseling session:

- Always discuss the problem in private.
- Clearly state what the problem is.
- Give the employee the opportunity to tell their side of the story. Find out if there are other circumstances that could have caused the problem. Perhaps the employee was provoked or threatened.
- Do not lecture. Focus on the incident, not on the person. Do not humiliate the employee or strip them of their dignity.
- Make the session light and positive. Do not conduct the meeting if you are upset.
- Discuss the action necessary to correct the problem. Always warn the employee of what will happen next if they are not in compliance with the discussed course of action. If the inappropriate behavior happens again, respond with the promised consequence.
- Treat the offense the same with everyone to avoid discrimination. Document this warning on your corrective counseling/disciplinary forms as a verbal warning.

WRITTEN WARNING

If you were not successful with one or more verbal warnings (depending on your discipline policies), the next step at our company would be a written warning. Continuous or repetitive violations of the same or different rules, not meeting company standards, or just plain insubordination (i.e. ignoring orders from a supervisor) is serious enough to constitute a written

warning, which should follow these guidelines:

- The notice should be as detailed as possible, including the date, time and place of each incident.
- State only the facts of the incident. Note on the form the specific conduct/safety rule that was violated.
- After discussing all of this with the employee, the supervisor should list the actions needed to correct the situation and explain each one to the employee so there is no misunderstanding.
- It is always best to have the employee sign the warning, but some employees may refuse to do so. If the employee refuses to sign the warning, simply write on the form "employee refuses to sign." You can also have a witness sign the form stating the same. A signed copy should be given to the employee as well as placing one in the employee file.

SUSPENSION

At our company, suspensions usually range from three to ten days without pay depending on the type of violation and/or previous warnings. Normally, a suspension is given to allow the employee time to think about the seriousness of the violation. The suspension also gives the supervisor, as well as other management, time to decide if any further disciplinary action is necessary.

TERMINATION

Always consider the overall costs involved of terminating an employee. Dollars invested, stress and morale are some of these hidden costs. Remember that failure to terminate is an unspoken acceptance of the disregard for company policies that could lead to serious morale issues. A replacement will likely be necessary in the event of a termination, which means more training, more dollars and more work for someone to cover until the "new" person is trained.

However, do not delay a termination. When it becomes necessary for this final action, the sooner it's done the better. Work closely with your Human Resources Department (if applicable) and let them assist you in dealing with this to help you understand any legal or contractual obligations. Document the termination and place a copy in the employee file. **IMMEDIATE**

TERMINATION

In some instances, serious offenses can and should be considered grounds for immediate termination that bypasses all other procedures. These offenses may possibly include the following:

- Fighting or threatening another person with bodily harm or injury.
- Vandalism to company and/or coworker property.
- Theft.
- Sexual Harassment.
- Safety violations that could harm others.
- Insubordination (e.g. abusive language and gestures to a superior).
- Alcohol and/or drug use while on the job or company premises. If an employee shows up for

work and you suspect they are under the influence of alcohol or drugs, allow them to clock in to work. This shows they have the intention to work while under the influence. Once this is done, confront the employee with your suspicions. Tell them they will need to submit to an alcohol and/or drug screen and they are suspended pending the results (if applicable to your policies). Do not allow the employee to drive to the clinic. Have a supervisor take the employee and stay at the clinic. I suggest you provide transportation for the employee to his home (i.e. cab, supervisor). Do not let him drive. Once the results are back, terminate the employee if the results are positive.

When terminating an employee, immediately state the specific violation and explain it. Depending on the situation, you may need to escort an employee off the premises. In the event there is bodily injury to another employee due to fighting, you may want to contact the police. Allow the employee to collect personal belongings with dignity or offer to collect them for the employee and forward them. Document everything that was said and all events that took place while it is still fresh in your mind. Again, always state only the facts.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Counseling is an effective way to retain good employees as well as provide those with potential the right guidance to help them overcome the few problems they might have. The current labor shortage is making it a real challenge to find the right employee, especially in the truss industry, so take the extra step and give your employees guidance and support. When in doubt about the steps to take, always remember to contact your Human Resources Department or your legal counsel. The ultimate goal is to have long-term employees and a low turnover rate. Effective counseling to correct problems before they get out of hand is one step toward obtaining that goal.

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