SECTION 3

Coaching/Counseling
The majority of employees want to do a good job. It is also recognized that without effective coaching and counseling, employees cannot be expected to deliver the results expected. This section seeks to inform managers how to set performance standards and how to follow-up on them.¹

¹For Bargaining Unit employees – the process outlined by contract will prevail.

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1. DETERMINING PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

Performance or conduct problems frequently arise because employees may not understand what the manager considers “acceptable” performance or conduct. The manager must be able to communicate to each employee not only what he/she wants the employee to do, but also what the specific standard is.

In the event an employee does not know what the manager considers acceptable, the employee will be unable to consistently meet the manager’s expectations.

Casual conversations and coaching are not steps of discipline. Still, in most cases, casual conversations and coaching should come before discipline.

The manager must determine the level of acceptable performance for each job or task he/she expects the employees to perform to expectations. While most work will frequently be well above the “acceptable” level, every employee must know exactly what his/her manager expects, and how their performance will be measured.

2. IDENTIFYING PERFORMANCE PROBLEMS

In order to accurately state an employee has a performance or conduct problem, the manager must be able to state specifically what performance or conduct is expected.

There is a big difference between suggestions and orders. An order is not an order unless the command is clearly communicated that way.

3. WHAT IS COACHING?

A Manager’s Responsibility

Coaching is what all managers do for employees as a matter of course. For example, we see a new employee perform a function inefficiently, and with tact, point out a better way of doing it.
4. WHEN IS COUNSELING APPROPRIATE?

Counseling is an appropriate solution to a performance or conduct problem after the manager has been assured that:

A. The employee knows how to do the job. (training issue)
B. The employee knows how well he/she is doing. (feedback issue)
C. The employee knows it makes a difference whether or not the job is done right, done wrong, or done at all. (consequences)
D. Nothing prevents the employee from doing the job properly. (obstacles)

Once the manager has ensured the employee is well trained and there are no problems with training, feedback, consequences, or obstacles, counseling is now appropriate to bring about a change in the employee’s performance or behavior.

5. TIMING

There are two important points about the timing when expecting effective change:

A. Counseling must occur immediately follow the employee’s behavior.
B. Don’t allow multiple occurrences before taking action.

6. DO NOT ALLOW ISSUES TO BUILD UP

Do not allow occurrences to accumulate to an excessive level before you decide to have a coaching or counseling session. Should an employee commit an offense not sufficiently serious to justify a Verbal Warning, hold an informal conversation with the employee about the incident. Taking care of issues when they occur will ultimately assist the manager because employees will have a better understanding of what is expected of them so fewer formal warnings may be necessary.
7. EXAMPLE OF AN ISSUE AND A SOLUTION

John Adams, Shift Manager, noticed Richard Roberts returning from his lunch break ten minutes late (3rd time in four days). John decided that since no previous problems or taking extended breaks had occurred, a Verbal Warning was not justified. Instead, he had an informal conversation with Richard about his reason for being late and the need to observe all break times accurately. Afterwards, the shift manager documented the informal conversation.

After counseling an employee, the manager must follow-up to make sure that the performance or conduct problem has been corrected.

Record the conversation on the Manager’s Log (optional, depending on location). A copy of the Manager’s Log is included in Section 2, Recordkeeping and an electronic copy can be accessed on the Zone under Manager Tools – “Counseling and Corrective Action.”

8. IF PERFORMANCE OR CONDUCT DOES NOT IMPROVE

Should the performance not improve the manager should take the next step in the disciplinary action process without delay.

9. IF PERFORMANCE OR CONDUCT DOES IMPROVE

Should the performance or conduct problem appear to be eliminated, the manager should tell the employee that he/she has NOTICED and APPRECIATES the improved performance or conduct.

10. PREPARING FOR THE COACHING/COUNSELING SESSION

A. Review mutually understood expectations with respect to job duties, projects, goals, standards and any pre-determined performance factors.

B. Observe and measure job performance against mutually understood expectations.
C. Review the employee’s background including:

- Skills
- Work experience
- Training
- Past performance

D. Determine the employee’s performance, strengths, and areas in need of improvement and:

- Put together specific examples that can be used to help communicate management’s position.
- Limit areas to those critical points that are the most important.
- Prepare a development plan in case the employee needs assistance in creating a suitable plan.
- Avoid common pitfalls, including focusing on those matters the employee has no control over.

E. Identify goals and standards for the future.

F. Give the employee advance notice of when the discussion will be held so that he/she can prepare.

G. Set aside an adequate block of uninterrupted time to allow a full and complete discussion.

   a. Show genuine interest in resolving the matter.
   b. Do not interrupt the employee.
   c. Listen attentively
   d. Make eye contact and ensure employee understands the situation.
11. CONDUCTING THE CONVERSATION

A. Begin by creating a sincere, open, and friendly, atmosphere.
   - Put the employee at ease
   - Review the purpose of the session
   - Make it clear that it is for the purpose of mutual problem-solving and goal-setting

B. Keep the focus on job performance and related factors.
   - Discuss job requirements – employee strengths, accomplishments, improvement needs, and evaluating results of performance against objectives set during previous reviews and discussions.
   - Be prepared to cite observed actions for each point you want to discuss.
   - Encourage the employee to evaluate his/her own performance.
   - Use questions to promote thought, understanding and problem-solving.

C. Encourage the employee to outline his/her plans for self-improvement before suggesting ideas of your own.
   - Get the employee to set personal growth and improvement targets.
   - Reach agreement on appropriate improvement plans which detail what the employee intends to do, a timetable, and support you are prepared to offer.

D. Make notes during the discussion for the purpose of summarizing agreements and follow-up. In closing:
   - Summarize what has been discussed.
   - Show enthusiasm for plans that have been made.
   - Give the employee an opportunity to make additional suggestions.
   - End on a positive, harmonious note.
12. FOLLOWING UP

A. Record the plans made, points requiring follow-up, and the commitments made.

B. (Optional) Record the coaching or counseling session on the Manager’s Log (copy included in Section 2, Recordkeeping, and on the Zone under Manager Tools – “Counseling and Corrective Action.”

C. Evaluate how you handled the discussion:

- What I did well.
- What I could have done better.
- What I learned about the employee and his/her job.