SECTION 4

Verbal Warnings
(Normally the First Offense)
After coaching, casual conversation, and counseling, Verbal Warnings are normally the first step in the disciplinary process. This section clarifies the role of Verbal Warnings and how to effectively apply them.¹

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

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1. **DEFINITION AND OVERVIEW**

A Verbal Warning is a conversation between a manager and an employee held in private. In the event similar behavior were to continue, a Verbal Warning would normally be regarded as the first formal step in the disciplinary process.

2. **PURPOSE**

The purpose of the Verbal Warning is to correct performance or conduct problems by bringing it to the employee’s attention in a serious but helpful manner.

3. **WHEN TO USE**

The Verbal Warning should be used after the manager is sure of the following:

   A. Previous casual conversations (counseling) with the employee, if appropriate, have not been successful in solving the problem.

   B. The employee knows what performance or conduct is expected.

   C. Nothing but the employee’s own action (or inaction) is preventing doing the job as expected or behaving properly.

4. **TIMING**

A Verbal Warning is best administered as quickly after the event as possible. In the case of negative behavior, drawing attention to the transgression immediately is the best way to correct it. Legally, this is also preferred because as time passes, memories tend to fade.

5. **BEFORE THE MEETING**

Conduct a thorough investigation of the incident. HRBP’s who will also be receiving this training, can be a good resource here as an impartial third party.

   A. Review any notes you have made about previous counseling sessions or casual conversations you have had with the employee about the problem.

   B. Prepare a short outline or agenda of the major points you plan to cover in the meeting.
C. Ask the employee to come into your office or other private area.

6. DURING THE MEETING

A. State the specific problem in terms of desired performance or conduct and actual performance or conduct.

B. Refer to any previous casual conversation you and the employee have had about this or other problems.

C. Give the employee a chance to respond and explain. Listen to what he/she says.

D. Tell the employee the specific performance or conduct change you expect and reaffirm Goodman’s and your expectation of sustained acceptable conduct or performance.

E. Ask the employee to confirm, in his/her own words, exactly what you expect.

F. Tell the employee this is a Verbal Warning and your hopes that the matter gets corrected. You must also tell the employee that if the situation does not change you may be forced to administer additional disciplinary action.

G. Indicate your confidence in his/her ability to improve performance (perform and behave properly in the future).

7. AFTER THE MEETING

A. Write a short note for your files documenting the meeting, including dates and topics of previous casual conversations.

   NOTE: The employee does not need to see or sign this note as it relates to a Verbal Warning only.

B. Enter the appropriate information on the optional Manager’s Coaching Log (copy included in Section 2, Recordkeeping, or on the Zone under Manager Tools – Counseling and Corrective Action.”

C. Monitor the employee’s performance or conduct to ensure the problems have been corrected.
8. EFFECTIVE PERIOD

A Verbal Warning will usually remain in effect for twelve (12) months, but depending on the nature of the situation a longer period may be necessary. Retaining a Verbal Warning on file longer than (12) months will require agreement with the HRBP.

9. EFFECT ON PAY INCREASE

A Verbal Warning should have no effect on any pay increase.

10. NOTATION ON PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL

A Verbal Warning should not be noted on a Performance Appraisal.

11. EFFECT ON TRANSFER OR PROMOTION

A Verbal Warning will generally not have any effect on a transfer or promotion but may be a consideration by the manager in the final decision.

12. EFFECT IN THE EVENT OF A REDUCTION IN FORCE

In the event of the need for a Reduction in Force, a Verbal Warning will not usually have any effect in determining which employees might be laid-off or retained.
13. REQUIRED DOCUMENTATION FOR VERBAL WARNINGS

Some may believe Verbal Warnings do not have to be documented. This is not true. All disciplinary actions must be documented and the document should reflect the employee was informed of the Verbal Warning. Again, this is normally the first step of the discipline process. Documentation in the case of a Verbal Warning can be as simple as a note that you gave the Verbal Warning in a day-timer or calendar.

VERBAL WARNING – Information to Include:

A. The employee’s full name.

B. The date of the Verbal Warning.

C. The specific offense or rule violation.

D. The specific statement made to the employee regarding the expected performance and actions necessary to improve.

14. DISTRIBUTION AND NOTIFICATION

The content of Verbal Warnings should be recorded, but only recorded for recordkeeping purposes – distribution, and notification is generally unnecessary unless a Written Warning becomes necessary later. Depending on location, the HRBP may require involvement.