

Make Disciplinary Meetings Not So Scary

Disciplinary meetings are often dreaded and can create anxiety and reluctance among team members, especially when the discussions revolve around performance. However, when approached thoughtfully, these interactions can foster growth, understanding, and open communication. Transforming a challenging moment into an opportunity for positive change involves considering the following steps:

1. Be Clear in Your Communication and Expectations

When conducting these conversations, clarity is crucial. Being transparent about the purpose of the meeting, the issues at hand, and the expected outcomes sets a constructive tone from the start and reduces confusion for the employee.

2. Define the Purpose

Start by clearly stating the objective of the meeting. Employees should understand that the goal is not to be confrontational but rather to address specific issues and collaborate on finding solutions. For example:

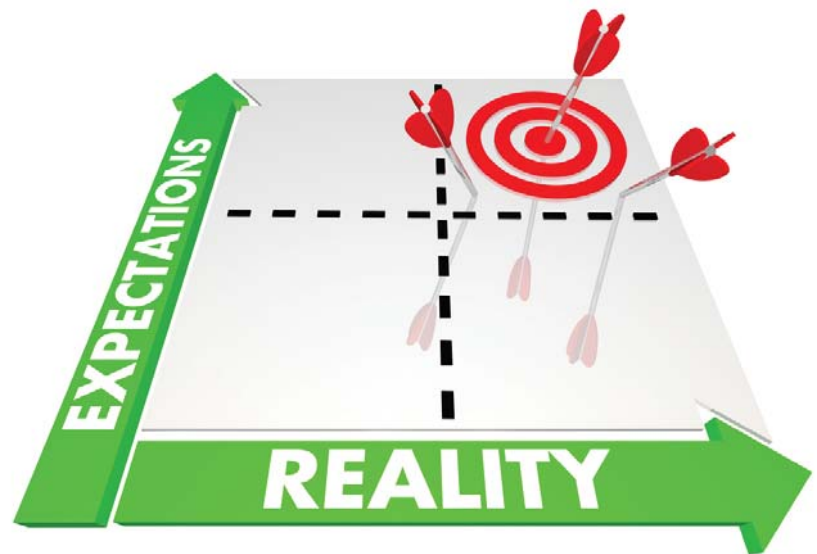
“Thank you for joining me today. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss some specific concerns regarding your recent performance. Our goal here is to understand the situation better and work together to find solutions.”

“I appreciate you taking the time to meet with me. I want to clarify that this meeting is not about punishment, but rather about addressing some issues we’ve noticed and collaborating on how we can support you moving forward.”

“I want to start by explaining the objective of our meeting today. We’re here to talk about some challenges you’ve been facing at work. It’s important for me that you know we’re on the same team, and I’m here to help you navigate these concerns.”

3. Outline the Issues

Clearly articulate the specific performance or conduct issues being addressed. Avoid ambiguous language; instead, provide concrete examples that illustrate the employee’s behavior or performance gaps. This helps the individual understand the context of the meeting and the impact of their actions.



4. Set Expectations

Clearly communicate the expected outcomes and discuss any necessary changes with the employee to align on a plan for how to move forward. The focus should be less about what the individual did in the past and more about empowering them to take the necessary steps toward improvement and accountability in the future. This includes:

- ▲ **Outlining Clear Goals:** Early in the meeting, specify what success looks like going forward, such as the employee improving their attendance or meeting deadlines.
- ▲ **Showing Your Support:** Invite the individual to share their perspective and any obstacles they are facing. You might ask, “What challenges are you encountering that we can address together?”
- ▲ **Discussing Actionable Steps:** Instead of focusing solely on past mistakes, guide the individual on how they can improve. For instance, you could suggest, “Let’s create a weekly schedule together to help you manage your time better.”
- ▲ **Providing Resources:** Offer tools or support that can help the employee succeed, such as mentoring or training programs.
- ▲ **Setting Follow-Up Meetings:** Schedule regular check-ins to monitor the employee’s progress and adjust the plan as needed. You could say, “Let’s meet every two weeks to review how things are going and make any necessary adjustments.”

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5. Preparation and Communication Tips for Managers

- ▲ **Prepare Thoroughly:** Review all relevant documentation and evidence before the meeting to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the situation and how to articulate your concerns.
- ▲ **Use Clear and Concise Language:** Avoid jargon and overly complex terms. Your language should be straightforward and easy to understand.
- ▲ **Document the Discussion:** Take notes during the meeting to document the conversation and any agreed-upon action items, such as a performance improvement plan (PIP). This ensures accountability and further clarifies the discussion.

6. Techniques for Effective Communication

Communication is a two-way street, but you can set yourself and your employees up for success by strengthening your skills and incorporating a few techniques.

- ▲ **Empathetic Language:** Using empathetic language helps acknowledge the employee's feelings and circumstances. Phrases such as, "I understand that this situation might be difficult for you" or "I appreciate your willingness to discuss this issue" can help set a supportive tone. Expressing empathy should always be genuine and based on a real understanding of the employee's circumstances so you can move toward meaningful solutions.
- ▲ **Active Listening:** This involves giving your full attention to the speaker, acknowledging their words, and providing them with thoughtful feedback. Encouraging verbal cues, such as nodding, or asking open-ended questions can help demonstrate active listening and understanding.

Transforming disciplinary meetings from daunting experiences into constructive conversations is entirely achievable with the right approach. By fostering open communication, prioritizing empathy, and emphasizing a collaborative problem-solving mindset, both managers and employees can engage in more positive and productive discussions. Remember, these meetings are not just about addressing issues but also about learning and growth. With a supportive environment and clear expectations, disciplinary meetings can become valuable opportunities for development rather than sources of anxiety.

An Employee Improvement Plan

When counseling an employee about their performance, have you ever thought about incorporating an EAP? If not, why?



The Employee Assistance Program

(EAP) is a work-based intervention program designed to help employees resolve personal problems that may affect their performance. EAP covers a wide range of issues such as interpersonal relationships, financial, legal, supervisory training, and more. It can be seen as a personal concierge service for life's challenges. EAP services are delivered through phone, video-based counseling, texts, email, or face-to-face interactions and are extended to all family members, regardless of their location, as long as they can provide the company ID code.

When addressing the root of a performance issue, an EAP can often be incorporated into the discussion. For example, if an employee is consistently late, and it is revealed that they are having childcare issues, the EAP can help them find appropriate childcare resources.

Another scenario is when an employee is not performing well due to personal stress, such as a family member's health condition. The EAP can provide support in such situations, including information about the health condition, counseling/support groups, childcare resources, medical care advocacy, personal assistance, and more.

EAP also offers a formal management referral, previously known as a mandatory EAP referral, where undergoing help from the EAP becomes a condition of employment. For example, if an employee struggles with anger management, a formal management referral can be issued, requiring them to attend recommended sessions.

Next time you encounter an employee relations issue, consider offering an EAP to your employees. EAP is an underutilized benefit but is greatly needed for your workforce.

If you have access to EAP, explore the program and its services. If you don't have an EAP program in place, TPM offers EAP to all our members, starting the first of the month following enrollment. Contact Kayci Walters at kwalters@tpmrs.com.