

Counseling and Progressive Discipline

County employment policy is designed to give each employee a full opportunity for work success. The success of this objective is dependent upon good employee selection procedures, thorough employee orientation, appropriate on-the-job training, periodic performance feedback, meaningful evaluations and a positive approach toward employee counseling and discipline by County supervisors.

Key aspects of good supervisory methods include recognizing and encouraging good performance, correcting performance problems, and building commitment to high standards and safe work practices. Coaching and counseling are normally the expected methods for the supervisor to initially confront an employee about a problem in the areas of work performance, conduct/safety or attendance.* Coaching is the ongoing process of communication a supervisor uses to strengthen an employee's performance and/or address unacceptable variances in the way in which the employee is behaving and/or performing their work. The objective of counseling is to help the employee to recognize that a problem exists, to develop effective solutions to it and to realign their performance and/or conduct to meet the organization's expectations. The supervisor uses these methods to:

- communicate what is expected of an employee
- discover any problems an employee may be having
- remove any obstacles to success that are out of the employee's control
- point the employee down the "road to success"

** There are times when the employee's conduct is so serious and/or willful that the supervisor's appropriate means of address is through discipline without prior counseling.*

Since it is the supervisor's approach to a performance problem that often brings about the employee's decision to change behavior, it is critical that the supervisor be prepared. Supervisors should focus on communicating an expectation of change and improvement in a professional, adult, non-threatening manner while, at the same time, maintaining the seriousness of the situation. When this approach is followed, most employees will recognize and correct their own performance deficiencies, thus precluding the need for discipline.

There are, however, times supervisors must use a more formal process – i.e., disciplinary action. Progressive discipline is a tool that may be used in the performance management and employee development process. When problems occur, they should be handled in reasonable ways that jointly support the concept of positive discipline and minimize the interruption of County services. Progressive discipline helps ensure that each employee is given opportunity for his/her work performance to conform to expected standards. Discipline should be used to correct behavior, not to "get even" for something that has occurred. Because discipline is to be corrective, the disciplinary action taken must clearly state what the employee needs to correct, must be applied consistently, and must be appropriate for the offense. [Personnel Rule 6](#) provides the guidance and framework to assist management and employees in meeting these objectives.

Human Resources staff provides information and guidance to both management and employees regarding counseling and disciplinary issues. If you need information or assistance, contact Employee Relations at 464-3506.