

How to Discipline Your Activity Staff

Leading a team is hard work. It is your job to make sure staff are doing what they are supposed to, following policies, and providing exceptional care. Most of the time, your team does a great job. But what happens when they don't?

Correcting and disciplining your staff is a part of your job, no matter how uncomfortable it can be. Here's how to do it effectively.

Why Good Discipline Can Make Your Team Better

Disciplining or correcting your staff doesn't make you a "mean" or "difficult" boss. In fact, effective and consistent discipline can make your team even stronger. Here are just a few benefits you might be able to see if you are following a consistent discipline plan, when needed:

- Everyone is on the same page with your expectations
- Better teamwork and morale because everyone knows they are following the same rules
- Exceptional communication between team members and other staff
- More productive staff means your department is able to get more done during the day
- Staff feel empowered to make decisions based on your expectations

Start with Education

Before you can correct staff and guide them to the correct policy/procedure to follow, you need to ensure your team knows your expectations as well as your community's rules. While new team members receive an employee handbook during their general orientation upon hire, it is crucial that you take the time to spend time to educate any new activity staff member about your department's expectations and policies. You can [create a checklist](#) to keep you on task and to ensure each new staff member is getting the same message from you, creating consistency.

Once you initially educate a new team member about expectations, you can set them up with a more veteran team member to see those policies in action. Consider having each new team member spend a few shifts shadowing another activity team member.

Finally, be sure you are covering policies and procedures during your monthly all-staff activity meetings. You can cover these expectations quickly at the start or end of the meeting and rotate topics each month.

Model Good Behavior

Now that your team knows the rules and expectations, it is time to show it in action through modeling. While your new employee orientation plan can include shadowing a more veteran staff

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member in your department, it is also important that you are out there modeling good behaviors like:

- Calmly handling conflicts
- Washing your hands and following good infection control protocol
- Advocating for resident rights
- Redirecting a resident when needed
- Documenting appropriately and on time

Correct Behavior Immediately

Now that your team knows the expectations and has seen you model those expectations regularly, they should be able to effectively perform at work. However, if you see a problem with a team member, make sure you point out the behavior, state how it affects others, and what the policy is. Be sure you are doing the correction in a private environment, as the residents and other team members should not be a part of that conversation.

When correcting the behavior, point out what you noticed and what you expect moving forward. Like this:

- Hi Georgia. I noticed that you were late for your shift today. You didn't call to let me know ahead of time and it made for a more hectic morning for the team. Our policy states you need to call if you are going to be late. Be sure to do that next time if you can't make it to work.
- Hi Bill, I noticed you didn't wash your hands before you started serving at the social. You could be spreading germs to residents who already have weak immune systems. Please wash your hands now and be sure you are washing before you serve any food next time.

Setup a Discipline Framework

Make time to have a meeting with your Human Resources manager to establish a discipline framework for your department. This is an easy way to ensure you are staying on the same page with all of your discipline. A common discipline framework might look like this:

- 1st offense: verbal warning
- 2nd offense: written warning
- 3rd offense: written plan of action
- 4th offense: termination

This framework typically means you are disciplining staff members for the same offense. If Bill doesn't wash his hands before serving food the next time, you will need to begin with a verbal warning and

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then move to the written warning if he still does not comply.

In most cases, the team member will adjust their behavior accordingly before you even need to get to a written plan of action.

Provide Resources

If you notice that your team is all struggling with the same policy or procedure, you might be dealing with a larger problem. For example, is everyone punching out late for the day? Maybe it is because they are trying to complete a to-do list that is too long. Instead of getting angry or disciplining the whole team, you might instead choose to talk to the team about what is happening. Perhaps you can provide better time management resources or tips that could help them better accomplish their daily duties on time.

Or, if you notice your entire team is not washing their hands before serving food at events, take the time to re-educate the entire team on the importance of infection control and *why* washing hands before serving food is important. Then, restate the expectations along with your disciplinary time moving forward.

General Discipline Best Practices

Having hard conversations about performance is never easy. However, you can keep it professional by:

- Not making it personal
- Giving concrete examples of when the staff member did not follow policy or did not meet expectations
- Restating expectations clearly
- Making sure the meeting is private and uninterrupted
- Asking for HR support as necessary
- Allowing the person the time to ask questions
- Ending the meeting if the person becomes defensive
- Giving the person a five minute break after the meeting if needed
- Keeping your discipline framework consistent no matter the policy or the staff member

What are some of your tips for disciplining your staff? Hopefully, if you do the front work of education and modeling, you won't have to formally discipline or correct too often.