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SUBJECT: FARM PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT - 5
A Positive Approach to Discipline
(Part II)
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Positive Discipline: Part Two

In our last article we stated that the traditional practice of firing the so-called problem employee is more difficult today, and may not have been the best labor management practice in the first place. We also stated that simply leaving employee discipline to the discretion of the supervisor creates a range of other psychological and organizational problems.

We said that employee discipline is an organizational issue, and that the creation of a positive policy and procedure is the responsibility of management. It is the top management who sets the tone as to the type of work environment desired.

Frito-Lay--Discipline, not Punishment

About five years ago, the management of a Frito-Lay manufacturing plant was experiencing severe disciplinary problems. According to Richard Grote, who was the manager of training and development (Mr. Grote is now the president of Personnel Performance Systems Corporation) and writing an article for the October, 1977 issue of, Training HRD, "the situation was intolerable and it was obvious that the continued use of the negative progessive discipline system would only make matters worse."

Grote searched around for an alternative system and found a process of positive discipline developed by a Canadian industrial psychologist, John Huberman. Huberman's system was developed for a small plywood mill and his results were published in the July-August, 1974 issue of the Harvard Business Review. The article was titled, "Discipline Without Punishment."

The two key features of the positive approach is to substitute "reminders" for warnings, and to replace the traditional three-day unpaid suspension with sending the employee home for a day, with pay, to decide whether they wanted to follow the rules or not.

Grote successfully developed a similar process for the Frito-Lay company. During the first nine months of the program, the number of disciplinary terminations were reduced from 52 to 16. The system of positive discipline was then replicated in other plants, including one with a union contract. The number of employees terminated for disciplinary reasons were reduced and fewer employees reached the final stages in the process.

Positive Discipline System, Not a Quickie

Grote warns, however, that the positive system can not be implemented overnight. If supervisors are to deal with discipline problems in a positive way, they will need some training. The idea of a paid day off to "think it over" was difficult for many of

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the traditional supervisors to accept. After years of using punitive techniques, supervisors require some coaching and practice before old habits are successfully abandoned.

Why Does It Work?

Why did the program of positive discipline work for Frito-Lay? Grote sums it up this way:

> The system worked for several reasons. First, all punishment was removed from the disciplinary system. In the first step, the focus was on reminding the employee of the need for the importance of the rule, rather than the warning that breaking it again would produce more serious consequences. In step two, the written documentation followed the conversation between the supervisor and the employee, rather than indicating the employee in advance of the conversation.
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> The critical change came in step three. Where the traditional progressive discipline system calls for the employee to be sent home for a period of three or five days without pay, in positive discipline, the supervisors were instructed to say something similar to this:
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> Harriet, this is the third time we've had to talk about this problem. The last time we talked I sent you a memo confirming the conversation, in which you indicated that you would do a better job from now on. The problem still has not been corrected and the situation is now extremely serious. You need to make a decision about whether you want to keep on working for the company and follow all the rules or not.
>
> I want you to spend tomorrow at home thinking about whether you want to continue to work for the company, follow all the rules, and be a good employee or not. This really is your decision to make, and I want you to make it a serious one. To indicate our hope that you do decide to change and become a good employee, we are going to pay you for the day. You need to know, though, that if you decide to continue working for us and any other problems arise, you will be terminated. I want you to come back to me at the beginning of your shift the day after tomorrow and let me know what your decision is.

The Following Is A Comparative Summary of The Two Systems of Discipline

Positive Discipline	Progressive Discipline
Step One: Oral Reminder	Step One: Oral Warning
The supervisor calls the employee into the office, discusses the offense, reminds the employee of the importance of the rule, and expresses confidence that this will be the last time they will need to discuss it.	The supervisor calls the employee into the office, discusses the offense, and warns the employee not to repeat it.

Step Two: Written Reminder

The supervisor calls the employee into the office and discusses the offense in a supportive but serious manner. After the meeting, the supervisor writes a memo to the employee which summarizes the conversation and confirms the employee's agreement to improve in the future.

Step Three: Decision-Making Leave

The supervisor calls the employee into the office, discusses the offense, then adivses the employee that he or she is not to come to work the next day but they will be paid. The employee is to spend that day deciding whether to continue working for the organization and follow all the rules or not. And report the decision the following day.

Step Four: Termination

If the employee decides to continue working for the organization, and another disciplinary problem arises, the employee is terminated.

Step Two: Written Warning

The supervisor writes a warning then calls the employee into the office. The employee is given the notice and they discuss the offense. The employee is warned that any future problems will lead to more severe disciplinary action.

Step Three: Disciplianry Layoff

The supervisor calls the employee into the office, discusses the offense, then advises the employee that he or she is being laid off without pay for a specific number of days. The supervisor warns that any future problems will result in termination.

Step Four: Termination

The employee is terminated.

* Richard Grote, "Positive Discipline: Keeping Employees in Line Without Punishment," Training HRD. October, 1977.

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