

Establishing a Disciplinary System FOR Golf Course Maintenance Crews

The performance of any organization is affected by employee acts as trivial as tardiness or as serious as drunkenness or fighting on the job. Often times the problem of discipline is as hard to deal with as it is necessary to face. Your effectiveness as a leader of your organization is determined a great deal by how you handle discipline problems.

Only a fair and consistent system of discipline and dismissal procedures provides a stabilizing force in employee control. Employees must understand that rules are made to be enforced, and that the company is not afraid to fire those who refuse to follow them. Unfortunately, many of us lack a standardized system for dealing with employee behavior problems. A standardized system is particularly needed when dealing with a relatively high turnover work force like we find on most golf courses.

Without a uniform policy for handling discipline problems, there are four problems which usually appear:

PARTIALITY - It is only natural to be more lenient with good workers or ones the manager is friendly with. But the surest way to make behavioral problems worse is to discipline some employees and not others.

INCONSISTENCY - Without guide lines for discipline, consistency of action is impossible. The word soon gets around and leads to further trouble.

USE OF DISCIPLINE FOR PUNISHMENT - The only constructive purpose for discipline is prevention, not punishment. It should be used to prevent the recurrence of behavior problems, not to get revenge. By misdirecting his efforts, a manager can create rather than solve problems.

FAILURE TO TAKE ACTION - Even when discipline is clearly called for, a manager or supervisor may fail to take action:

1. To avoid the unpleasant experience
2. Because he may fear being "tagged" as hard nosed
3. In an attempt to delay action by claiming lack of time
4. Because the employee realizes the offense and will not repeat it.

But, failure to deal with problems promptly often results in implied acceptance or approval of the offense. This will result in increased occurrences and the manager will lose control of one of his most important responsibilities.

MANAGER'S RESPONSIBILITY

It is up to management to create an effective and workable discipline policy. Management must also see to it that discipline is enforced consistently and impartially. By equal enforcement of standards, giving adequate warnings, and allowing warned employees the chance to redeem themselves, the organization can demonstrate that employee discharges are not done as vindictive punishment for past mistakes, but as preventive actions.

DISCIPLINE POLICY

The best approach to discipline is one in which the employee experiences the offense and its resulting discipline as one related event. Punishment is not given for moral reasons, but because a rule has been violated; the discipline is directed at the act, not at the person.

Not all offenses should be treated alike. Offenses fall into three categories according to the appropriate discipline action. The following is a partial list of common offenses to show how they fit into the three categories.

1. Offenses resulting in immediate discharge:
 - * Theft
 - * Fighting
 - * Refusal to Work
 - * Willful destruction of Property
 - * Gross Insubordination
 - * Falsifying time cards
 - * Under influence of drugs
2. Offenses resulting in a written warning with immediate suspension or discharge for a second offense:
 - * Careless or improper use of company property
 - * Sleeping on the job
 - * Two days absence without notice
 - * Failure to comply with an order, rule or regulation
3. Offenses resulting in an oral warning for first offense, a written warning for a second offense, and suspension or discharge for a third offense:
 - * Tardiness
 - * Unauthorized absence from job or work area
 - * Foul or abusive language
 - * Inefficiency, incompetence, or negligence in the performance of duties.

The above list is meant to be suggestive, and each golf course should tailor its disciplinary policy to suit its needs and circumstances. Once the disciplinary policy, guidelines, and action have been determined, they should be

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widely posted and publicized.

LEVELS OF DISCIPLINE

There also must be uniform procedures for administering discipline on each of the four levels - oral reprimand, written warning, suspension, and discharge.

THE ORAL REPRIMAND

The most crucial aspect of the oral reprimand is how it is conducted. It must be delivered in private immediately after the infraction has occurred. Any delay could give the impression that the offense was condoned. The atmosphere should be non-punitive and informal, and the offender should be given the chance to tell his side of the story and explain the facts as he sees them. The supervisor should point out the problems that have arisen or will occur as a result of the infraction. A good rule of thumb is to address the offense, rather than the person who committed it.

When the supervisor has compared the facts of the offense with the employee's account of it, he should inform the employee of the resulting decision. This may include any expected improvement in the employee's performance, any assistance the supervisor plans to give the employee in correcting the problem, any penalty to be imposed, and the follow-up action that will be taken.

The supervisor should not be angry, hostile or sarcastic, but must be firm, show concern, and be clear about the response given to the infraction. It must be pointed out that the reprimand is not given because higher management expects it, but because of the employee's obligation to the supervisor and to the organization as a whole.

After the reprimand has been given, the supervisor should make a note for the employee's file of what was discussed and when.

THE WRITTEN WARNING

When a written warning is called for, it should be preceded by an interview similar to the oral reprimand, differing only in that the employee is told at the conclusion of the interview that a written warning is to be issued. The written warning should include a statement of offense, an identification of the rule that was broken, the consequences of continued infractions, any commitment on the employee's part to correct his or her behavior, and any follow-up actions to be taken. The employee should be given the original and asked to sign the personnel file copy. If he or she refuses it, a notation to that effect should be made on the copy.

SUSPENSION

A suspension notice should be issued only after a disciplinary interview has been conducted. For minor infractions, suspension is appropriate only after a record or oral and written warnings has been established. For major infractions, of course, suspension is

warranted without a record of prior offenses.

Suspension is used instead of dismissal when management feels that the employee is sincere about wanting to correct his behavior. It is also used when management feels a dismissal would not be upheld if taken into arbitration.

DISCHARGE

For offenses other than those that call for immediate discharge, management should not resort to dismissal unless all other problem-solving and disciplinary efforts have failed. Once the decision to discharge an employee is made, it is best for him or her to leave as soon as a written notice of dismissal (contains similar information to the written warning) can be prepared and presented to the employee. If the violation is so flagrant that the offender must be discharged on the spot, the written notice can be sent later.

CONCLUSION

An effective, formal discipline system has obvious advantages for management, and even for the disciplined employees themselves. Good employees like to know where they stand, what the rules are, and how the company feels about their performance. They like to know that the disruptive behavior of others will not go uncorrected. They like a just system aimed at prevention rather than punishment.

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The above material is not all my original material. It is from notes and articles that I have accumulated. I hope you will find some helpful and thought provoking ideas for your unique situation.

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