BEST PRACTICES for EFFECTIVELY MANAGING YOUR TEAM
STARTING OUT RIGHT

“Hire people who are better than you are, then leave them to get on with it. Look for people who will aim for the remarkable, who will not settle for the routine.”—David Ogilvy

Research has shown that an employee often decides within their first 90 days whether or not they want to stay with an organization long term. You’ve spent a lot of time choosing the right person, now it falls on you to ensure they stay. You do this by investing in them from day one to make sure they have the necessary resources and motivation to be successful in their new roles.

Sending new employees to New Employee Orientation is an important first step, but it is not the only step.

A few “best practices” to follow:

1. Make sure you are in the office and have planned a light work day on their first day of employment. Be available to ensure they are settling in and answer any questions they may have.

2. Take them to lunch. Let them know you are grateful they are there and that you aren’t taking them, or their experience, for granted. Introduce them to your team and other colleagues, and explain everyone’s roles and how those roles interact with and are dependent on each other. It’s important to allow your new employee to view themselves as part of the team, with you as the leader, from day one.

3. Give them an “early win” challenge assignment. Have a project ready that they can start on immediately and complete quickly, but that provides enough of a challenge that they feel confident regarding the new role and their contributions to the team.

4. Follow up with them frequently over the next few weeks, and make sure to sit down with them and touch base on any concerns every 30 days minimum. At 90 days, give them a quick, unofficial 90-day evaluation so they know whether they are meeting your expectations. This is the time to address any performance concerns you have and offer them the opportunity to raise any questions or concerns they may have. This meeting often sets the tone for the next year of performance.
EVALUATING PERFORMANCE

“The true measure of the value of any business leader and manager is performance.”—Brian Tracy

An essential aspect of good management is immediate and frequent feedback, both positive and negative. Don’t wait until an employee has made an error to touch base with them. Let them know when they are doing things well and when they have exceeded your expectations. Frequent conversations of this nature make it much easier to offer guidance when correction is needed, as you will have a stronger relationship with them and a solid foundation of good communication.

Don’t be afraid to listen to your employees. The more you communicate with them, the more likely they are to communicate with you. They may have a valuable perspective that you hadn’t yet had the opportunity to evaluate.

While Virginia Tech policy requires annual reviews and six month probationary reviews, regularly scheduled meetings to discuss any concerns and acknowledge successes are a good way to keep communication open and expectations clear. If you are doing a good job of frequent feedback, this may be a natural event; however, if you find yourself struggling to touch base with your employees on a regular basis, designate one or two days every three months to do quarterly reviews. In case of performance concerns, scheduled reviews of this nature will also assist you in appropriately documenting expectations and potential disciplinary concerns in a timely manner.

More information on performance evaluations and performance management are available online.

APPROPRIATE COMMUNICATION

“The art of effective listening is essential to clear communication, and clear communication is necessary to management success.”—James Cash Penney

It is imperative to remember that no matter how close you and your employees become or how frustrated you may become with a performance or behavior issue, you must maintain appropriate levels of communication at all times. This includes not veering too far into the informal/casual communication of friends as well as not raising your voice angrily or berating employees in a manner that humiliates, belittles, insults, or threatens them.
Unfortunately, no matter how frequent your feedback or how open your communication, at some point in every manager’s career there comes a time when disciplining an employee becomes necessary. When that time comes, we strongly recommend you reach out to the Office of Employee Relations before embarking on any disciplinary action. The goal of any and all discipline is to improve the performance and/or behavior of the employee. It is not intended to “punish” employees for wrong doing and is definitely not driven by the goal of termination. Every disciplinary action taken should be evaluated for three primary factors:

1. Did this action have a negative impact on our business operations?
2. Is this fair and equitable discipline based on the specifics of the infraction (severity, frequency, prior discipline)?
3. Will this action, taken in this manner, provide the employee with the appropriate guidance to improve their performance and/or behavior?

The goal of discipline is to improve performance.

CLASSIFIED AND UNIVERSITY STAFF

The university practices a progressive disciplinary process which differs somewhat depending on whether you are supervising staff or faculty employees. The following section describes the progressive disciplinary process for staff employees.
If you have already had a verbal consultation with your employee (or it is too severe a misconduct to handle solely with a conversation) and, in consultation with the Office of Employee Relations, you determine there is a need to advance to the next level of discipline (whether it be counseling memos or written notices), be sure to have clearly documented evidence of the alleged infractions.

1. Document specific facts related to the infraction.
   Example: Instead of simply stating “you have a bad attitude,” say “Yesterday, 3/3/17, you stated, “I hate my job” so loudly that three coworkers heard you from their individual offices. This type of unprofessional and disruptive behavior makes it difficult for others to do their jobs and impedes your ability to perform the duties of your role, which require professionalism and good communication.”

2. Detail the negative impact on the business operation. You are disciplining an employee because their misconduct negatively affects the operations of the business.
   Example: “Yesterday, 3/3/17, you arrived for work two hours late without notifying anyone of your delay. You are a receptionist, whose job it is to answer phones and greet visitors to our department. When you do not come to work on time, there is no one available to do these tasks. In addition, your colleagues must then leave their responsibilities to complete yours. This causes the department to fall behind in its obligations to the university.”

Government cannot take away a citizen’s life, liberty, or property interest without giving them notice and a fair hearing.

Staff employees must be provided a minimum 24-hour notice (Due Process) of impending discipline. This allows them time to think about the situation, compile evidence rebutting your allegations, and prepare an argument as to why discipline may not be justified in this situation. The Office of Employee Relations can assist you with drafting the required Due Process Letter as well as the Written Notice. After the Due Process meeting, you may, in fact, agree with them and decide not to move forward with the discipline you were previously considering.

Templates relating to staff discipline are available in the Employee Resource Guide.

Wage employees and staff employees who are still within their probationary period do not have access to the Progressive Discipline Process and may be terminated at any time, without notice, for performance or behavioral concerns. Please contact the Office of Employee Relations to discuss your options in regards to these employees.

We strongly recommend that you consult with the Office of Employee Relations before initiating any disciplinary action.

FACULTY CLASSIFICATIONS

While some tenants of progressive discipline remain the same regardless of the classification of the employee with whom you are dealing, other aspects change significantly. As with all employees, immediate and effective communication of the problem is essential, and it is strongly advised that you always document any conversations that relate to performance or behavior. However, if you supervise Administrative/Professional Faculty(A/P) or other faculty employees, and the time comes that verbal counseling is no longer effective—or if the situation is so severe that verbal counseling would not be sufficient, please contact the Office of Employee Relations or the Office of the Provost for guidance.
“Surround yourself with the best people you can find, delegate authority, and don’t interfere as long as the policy you’ve decided upon is being carried out.”—Ronald Reagan

DISMISSAL

While the goal of all discipline is to improve performance and/or behavior, there are times when dismissal from employment becomes necessary. Termination of employment can occur in one of two ways:

- **Progressive discipline** (the same infraction occurring repeatedly within a specific period of time), or
- **Severe infractions** that impact operations to such an effect that termination is recommended for the first infraction.

The Office of Employee Relations will help you to determine which approach is most appropriate, depending on the nature of the specific situation. Even in situations in which termination is recommended, the employee is still owed Due Process. NEVER attempt to terminate an employee without first consulting with the Employee Relations office (for staff and A/P faculty employees), the Provost’s office (for some faculty employees), and, in some cases, University Legal Counsel.

Dismissal can be a very emotional process, for both you and the employee. Employees are eligible for Employee Assistance Program (EAP) benefits through the end of the month in which they are terminated. The Office of Employee Relations can help you throughout the process, including how to manage the termination meeting.

Templates relating to terminating employment are available in the Employee Resource Guide.

An employee has the right to grieve any disciplinary decision, up to and including termination, provided the grievance is filed within 30 days of the action taken.

An overview of the grievance process can be found online.

IMPROVING MANAGEMENT POTENTIAL

SUPERVISOR TRAINING

“Those people who develop the ability to continuously acquire new and better forms of knowledge that they can apply to their work and to their lives will be the movers and shakers in our society for the indefinite future.”—Brian Tracy

You were promoted or hired into your new role as a supervisor because your manager saw something in you that made them confident you would do a great job in this position. Maybe you were exceptionally good at your job, or perhaps you have shown a natural ability to lead other people. We want to help you be successful in this role. Here are some further recommendations for how to succeed as a supervisor at Virginia Tech:

1. Find a mentor, a manager you can respect, who will help you with the little nuances that help you become a better manager to employees and a better manager of a function.

2. Build relationships with your HR Partner and the Office of Employee Relations team. They are a wealth of information as it relates to policy and process, and have worked with hundreds of managers on employee related issues. Their job is to make you a better manager so that your employees will be better employees.
3. Take advantage of the training opportunities offered across campus. They are listed on training.vt.edu and uopd.vt.edu.

4. Curious about something? Look to lynda.com, an online source with on-demand tutorials about thousands of different topics. The service is free to all Virginia Tech employees.

EVALUATIONS

“By three methods we may learn wisdom: First, by reflection, which is noblest; Second, by imitation, which is easiest; and third, by experience, which is the bitterest.”—Confucius

Once a year, all Virginia Tech employees participate in the employee evaluation process. As a manager, this time of year is often spent focusing on the performance of your employees, and, as we’ve already discussed, this is a very important part of your responsibility. However, if you’ve been doing your job well up to this point, it shouldn’t be that difficult. But while you are focusing on your employees’ performance, your manager will be focusing on yours. Hopefully they have been communicating with you throughout the year, as you have been communicating with your employees. If so, nothing they have to say should come as a surprise.

However, performance evaluations are not just about how you evaluate your employees’ performance, or how your manager views your performance. Performance evaluations are also about three other very important perspectives:

1. How YOU view your performance over the past year: What goals do you have for the future? What resources or training may you need to do your job more effectively? In what areas are you strong, and in what areas could you use some improvement? It is important to be as honest and insightful in your self-evaluation as you can be. This is an opportunity to provide your management with some specifics on what you’ve done well, as well as to ask for the things you need to do your job even better. This is your time, if you haven’t already done so, to raise concerns with your management regarding areas in which you need help improving or problems you may be having.

2. How your EMPLOYEES view your performance as a manager: While a good manager may be constantly communicating both praise and concern to his/her employees, it is not always as easy to receive the same feedback from one’s subordinates. A crucial aspect of self-evaluation is that of analyzing your leadership traits and management capabilities to ensure that you are providing the same exemplary level of management to your employees that you expect from your management. The Office Employee Relations can help you determine how to seek effective feedback from your employees.

3. How your COLLEAGUES view your performance as a team member: Take one or two trusted (and honest) colleagues out to lunch and ask them to frankly evaluate areas in which you could improve, as a manager and team player. You may be surprised at how willing they are to share their perspectives, and their eagerness to receive the same feedback from you.

MANAGING EMPLOYEE CONCERNS

“Good management is the art of making problems so interesting and their solutions so constructive that everyone wants to get to work and deal with them.”—Paul Hawken

Like it or not, there will be employees who are not pleased with how you are managing them or their department. Sometimes these complaints are warranted, sometimes they are not. In the interest of making you a better manager and making Virginia
Tech a better place to work, when complaints are made, the Office of Employee Relations has an obligation to do something with them. Here are some of the typical ways in which complaints are handled:

1. In most cases, the Office of Employee Relations will recommend that the employee either speak directly to the manager or go up the chain of command to the manager’s supervisor.

2. If the employee is not comfortable with that, with their permission, Employee Relations will reach out to the manager or the direct supervisor, whoever is most appropriate depending on the situation.

3. In some situations, if multiple employees have made complaints about the same manager and/or situation, regardless of whether or not they want the complaints made public, Employee Relations will initiate a conversation with the manager or supervisor regarding the repeated concerns.

4. If what is brought to the attention of Employee Relations violates a university policy (such as the University Policy 1025: Harassment, Discrimination, and Sexual Assault), Employee Relations is obligated to pass on what they have learned to the appropriate office.

In all of these situations, Employee Relations is eager to work with the management and the employees to determine a resolution that is appropriate, fair, and supports the policies and successful operations of Virginia Tech.

MANAGEMENT RESOURCES

FEEDBACK

“No great manager or leader ever fell from heaven; it’s learned, not inherited.”—Tom Northup

Being a manager (whether this is your first year or your fifteenth year) can create an added motivation for your work, will provide you with new, valuable experience, and give you a heightened level of responsibility, but it is also difficult. Know that you have resources to help you be the best manager you can be, so that you can have the high performing, motivated, and engaged employees on your team.

Remember: The goal of good management is to guide your employees to achieving their optimal performance.

The feedback tool is an additional resource for you. This tool is a confidential three question survey that asks you:

1. What can we do to help you be more successful moving forward?
2. What could/should we have done better/differently that would have better prepared you for this role?
3. Do you have any concerns or needs right now that you’d like to address with us?

The feedback tool is confidential. The only goal is to help us help you be better at your job. Of course, you can reach out to the Employee Relations team with any questions, concerns, or immediate needs at any time.

You can access the survey from www.hr.vt.edu or by calling 540-231-2850.
Department of Human Resources

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