



PROGRESSIVE DISCIPLINE

Most situations in which formal disciplinary action is needed **can usually be prevented** by proper employee selection, clear and adequate instructions (including job descriptions and policies), periodic observation and communication, and appropriate recognition.

Sometimes, however, even after earnest efforts at corrective instruction, some employees will still violate established rules and standards. In such cases the prompt application of appropriate disciplinary measures is an imperative and inescapable obligation of the manager.

Since discipline is a periodic necessity within a large organization such as Cooperative Extension, then, the importance of establishing and adhering to disciplinary policies and procedures that are **fair, prompt, and legally sufficient** cannot be emphasized too strongly. This is dictated not only by common ethics, but also by University and state and federal laws which require that the more severe forms of discipline comport with the due process.

The requisites of fairness, promptness, and legal sufficiency can usually be satisfied by the disciplinary process known as *A*progressive discipline. It is this process that should be the hallmark of disciplinary practices throughout Cooperative Extension. And it is this process that is the standard by which disciplinary actions are judged when appealed to the various personnel boards.

Simply stated, **progressive discipline means that discipline is applied in several stages of severity, culminating if necessary in dismissal.** The usual sequence is oral reprimand, written warning, suspension (without pay), and **dismissal.** Each stage, therefore, moves closer to termination and each one in turn is designed to stimulate a change in the behavior that activated the disciplinary process. Moreover, **the staging is so timed that the employee has the opportunity to correct his/her behavior prior to the next stage. The goal is to apply the minimum level of discipline that will bring the employee=s performance up to the expected level.**

There are several types of progressively severe disciplinary actions that may be recognized or permissible by each University. In general order of severity they are:

1. Oral reprimand
2. Written warning
3. Suspension without pay

4. Suspension with pay
5. Dismissal

Oral reprimands and written warnings are warning procedures and are the least harsh of the several types of disciplinary actions. They are usually the first two steps in the progressive discipline sequence. When properly documented they provide evidence that the manager has observed a progressive sequence if a more severe form of discipline is applied in a subsequent violation. These warnings are typically grievable through the University grievance procedure.

The **oral reprimand** may be utilized as a management tool by a manager at any level, i.e., coordinating agent (EFNEP), County Extension Coordinator, Lab Supervisor, Specialist, Extension Program Leader, etc. The **written warning** should be used by appropriate management. **Any written warning must include a statement regarding grievance rights and provide an opportunity for the aggrieved employee to discuss the matter with a person in higher management positions.**

All oral reprimands should be documented in the employee's performance file.. A copy of the written warning should be filed in the employee's official personnel file.

The more severe types of discipline B **suspension** and **dismissal** B are all subject to specific procedural requirements. The importance of adhering to the procedures cannot be stressed too strongly as a deficiency in any respect may result in the action being reversed on appeals.

There may be exceptions to the process. Specifically, there are occasions when an employee must be removed from the job without delay. This includes such circumstances as when it is likely that the employee has committed a felony or other crime involving moral turpitude, or when his/her continued presence on the job might endanger the employee or others or be unduly disruptive to the operations. In such instances, this emergency discipline measure is known as *A*suspension-with-pay@.

The objective of the disciplinary process is not to get rid of an employee but rather to get his/her attention and thus bring his/her performance up to the expected level. The application of the process in all its stages should be characterized by fairness, promptness, and legal sufficiency. Again, these requisites can usually be satisfied by establishing and adhering to a policy of progressive discipline.

Adapted from: University of Georgia Cooperative Extension