

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



907 Should Discipline be a “Community” Effort?

The decision to discipline workers, such as termination, is a task no manager looks forward to. However, as they say, it comes with the territory — right? Well, does it have to come with the territory? Does the manager have to be the one to sift through the evidence, and make the call? We’ll talk that over, next, on The Extra Point.

Over the years, I’ve received a few calls from business owners or managers, telling me they’ve got a problem with a certain worker, and more or less looking for an opinion on what to do. A few times, it has involved a possible employee termination. In general, they’d want to know what I would do if I was in their shoes.

It’s never been a cut-and-dried situation. There are always circumstances, details, uncertainties, and I end up asking a boatload of questions, trying to figure out what is real. My goal is to help the person think his/her way through the issue, until the decision is clear. These days, I take a different approach.

Now, the first thing I ask is if there is a clearly understood set of standards that all workers live by, and did the employee in question violate any of them?

The usual answer to that is they have an employee handbook. The next question I ask is whether they’ve ever openly discussed anything in the handbook. The answer to that is almost always no.

First, most employee handbooks need to be updated, redesigned, with friendlier and easier to understand language. This encourages that discussion. Employees should have some input into what ends up in the handbook. In almost all cases, they don’t.

Guam Training has a course, Professionalism 101, in which we get people talking about how

they want to engage each other in the workplace, the standards they want to establish, what they want more of, less of, etc. It’s all about standards. Who are we going to be in this place, and how are we going to treat each other?

When those conversations take place, the decisions reached should wind up in the employee handbook. When they do, a couple of pretty important things happen. First, the team realizes they actually have a voice in designing their own workplace, and that is huge. Second, if somebody ignores a standard or rule, then the appropriate response from management is expected.

Now, the third benefit comes into focus. The team sees that management doesn’t play favorites. Any discipline that gets handed down is given equally to any and all offenders. If Tommy is fired for being late x-number of times, then you fire Mary when she does the same thing.

In most companies, especially smaller ones, the owner or top manager makes the call on disciplinary issues, and everybody else just lives with it. On the other hand, when you rule by community — that is, through agreements made by all workers — the task is simplified.

Is such an idea worth considering for your company? I strongly believe that giving workers a greater voice in this kind of issue serves to build trust, and makes the organization stronger.

That’s The Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I’m Jerry Roberts.

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