

## Hospitality People Ops Cheat Sheet: Chit Chat Edition

*For frontline managers, operators, and owners navigating people issues in the hospitality industry. Includes notes for California and New York where applicable.*

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## Page 1: Introduction

### Purpose:

This cheat sheet is designed to help hospitality leaders handle employee issues with confidence, clarity, and compliance. Whether you're coaching a server, documenting a bartender's absence, or navigating a sensitive situation, this guide offers practical templates, tone guidance, and key compliance notes.

### Tone Matters:

Hospitality is human. You're not a corporate robot, and neither is this guide. When in doubt, be direct, warm, and fair. Document clearly. Speak kindly. And know when to escalate.

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## Page 2: Progressive Discipline Framework

### Standard Steps:

1. Verbal Warning (Documented internally)
2. Written Warning
3. Final Written Warning (Optional)
4. Termination

### Best Practices:

- Stay consistent across similar infractions
- Document each step, even verbal warnings
- Allow space for the employee to respond
- In tipped environments, consider how schedule flexibility and informal shift trades can complicate enforcement. Apply discipline evenly, regardless of position or pay structure.

### CA/NY Notes:

- CA and NY are both at-will states, but terminations should still be well-documented to reduce liability

- In NY, provide a termination notice with final pay per NY Labor Law § 195
  - In CA, provide final pay **immediately** if the employee is terminated (Labor Code § 201)
  - NY has strong worker protection and is litigation-prone—over-document and avoid off-the-cuff comments
  - CA is highly regulated: wage statements, break tracking, and waiting-time penalties are frequent legal flashpoints
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## Page 3: Common Infractions + Sample Language

Infraction	Sample Write-Up Language
Tardiness	"Employee arrived 15 minutes late for the third time in a two-week period. We reminded the employee of the importance of punctuality in team-based service environments."
No-Show	"Employee failed to report for a scheduled shift on [date] with no prior communication. This is considered a no-call, no-show."
Attitude	"Employee used an unprofessional tone with a coworker during pre-shift. Coaching was provided on maintaining professionalism and respect."
Guest Complaint	"Received a report from a guest citing rudeness from employee. Employee was made aware of the concern and coached on de-escalation and hospitality standards."
Tip Pool Violation	"Employee failed to report tips accurately and withheld cash tips from the designated pool. We reviewed the tip-sharing policy and clarified expectations moving forward."
Service Abandonment	"Employee left their post during active service without notifying a supervisor. This created a disruption in team flow and guest experience."

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## Page 4: Coaching Scripts (Verbal)

### Tardiness

"Hey [Name], I noticed you've been clocking in a few minutes late. I get that things happen, but consistency really matters in a team service setting. Let's figure out how to tighten that up—what's getting in the way?"

### Hygiene/Appearance

“I want to check in quickly—your appearance today wasn’t quite in line with our dress code. Not a big deal, but worth flagging now so it doesn’t become a thing. You good with that?”

### **Attitude Toward Team**

“I’ve noticed some tension in the way you’re talking to others. It’s not about being fake—it’s just about keeping the vibe professional and collaborative. You cool checking in on that?”

### **If behavior doesn’t improve:**

“We’ve talked about this a couple times now. At this point, it’s not just a quick coaching—it’s becoming a pattern. I need to see a shift here, or we’ll have to document this more formally. Can you commit to that?”

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## **Page 5: Documentation Template (Verbal + Written)**

### **Verbal Warning Log (Internal Use)**

- Employee Name:
- Date:
- Issue Discussed:
- Manager Notes:
- Employee Response (if any):
- Follow-up Plan/Next Steps:

### **Written Warning Template**

**To:** [Employee Name]  
**From:** [Manager Name]  
**Date:** [Date]  
**Subject:** Written Warning – [Issue]

This letter serves as a formal written warning regarding [describe issue]. This behavior does not meet the expectations for your role as a [position]. We’ve previously discussed this on [dates]. Continued issues may lead to further disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

Employee Acknowledgement: \_\_\_\_\_

Manager Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

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## **Page 6: Policies Quick Reference**

**Call-Outs:**

- Call or text manager at least **2 hours before** scheduled shift
- For multiple call-outs in 30 days, require documentation

**Cell Phone Use:**

- Not permitted in guest-facing areas
- Silent mode during shift

**Uniforms:**

- Clean and presentable
- Branded attire (if issued) must be worn

**Clock-In Rules:**

- No early punches more than 5 min prior to shift
  - Missed punches = notify manager immediately
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## **Page 7: Legal Hot Zones (When to Pause + Escalate)**

**Use this checklist before taking any action in sensitive cases:**

- Is this issue related to a protected class? (race, gender, disability, etc.)
- Has the employee disclosed a medical or mental health issue?
- Is there a pattern of retaliation or favoritism that could be perceived?
- Are we consistent with how this has been handled before?
- Does this need to be documented in writing or escalated to ownership or HR?

**Common Scenarios to Escalate Immediately:**

- **Harassment or Discrimination Allegations**

- **Medical Notes or Health Disclosures**
- **Alcohol/Drug Concerns on the Job**
- **Immigration Questions or Documents**

#### **CA/NY Specific Triggers:**

- CA: Missed meal/rest breaks, improper tip deductions, termination timing
  - NY: Wage theft claims, hours misreporting, lack of written policies or acknowledgements
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## **Page 8: Termination Best Practices**

#### **Checklist Before Termination:**

- Have you documented the issue?
- Has the employee been given a chance to improve?
- Are you being consistent with how you've handled others?
- Have you consulted ownership or HR?

#### **Final Pay Rules:**

- **CA:** Pay is due **immediately** at time of termination (Labor Code § 201)
- **NY:** Pay by next scheduled payday. Provide written notice of termination (Labor Law § 195)

#### **Suggested Language:**

"We've talked about [issue] multiple times, and unfortunately we haven't seen enough change. At this point, we're going to part ways. Your final check will be [timing]. We appreciate the work you've done."

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## **Page 9: Tone Guide – How Chit Chat Talks**

#### **Avoid:**

- "Per policy section 4.3..."

- “This behavior is unacceptable.”
- “Failure to comply will result in termination.”

**Use:**

- “Here’s the expectation...”
- “This isn’t about punishment, it’s about improvement.”
- “We want to support you, but we need to see a change.”

**Chit Chat = Clear + Kind + No Nonsense**

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## **Page 10: FAQ & Rapid Response**

**Q: What if I didn’t document the verbal warning before now?**

A: Write it down now as a note-to-file. Note the date and what was said.

**Q: What if the employee refuses to sign the write-up?**

A: Note that on the form. You can say “Employee declined to sign. Manager reviewed content verbally.”

**Q: Can I fire someone without any warnings?**

A: Legally yes (at-will), but it’s risky. Always better to document.

**Q: What if they say something about mental health or disability?**

A: Pause. Thank them for sharing. Document the interaction and elevate to HR or ownership before acting.

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**End of Cheat Sheet – For Chit Chat Internal Use**