

SUBJECT:	ORIGINATING DEPT:	SECTION:
PROGRESSIVE COUNSELING	HUMAN RESOURCES	PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT
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APPROVED BY: Human Resources	PAGES: 4	

I. POLICY/PURPOSE

As highlighted in the Company handbook, your employment with the Company is at-will. The Company is not obligated to use this or any other form of discipline prior to discharging an Associate and retains the right to terminate your employment at any time, for any reason. When behavior and performance are not within acceptable standards, progressive counseling should be used to facilitate prompt, fair, and uniform corrective action.

II. ASSOCIATES COVERED BY THE POLICY

All salaried exempt, salaried non-exempt, and non-union hourly Associates of the Company are covered by this Policy.

III. RESPONSIBILITY FOR ADMINISTRATION

The Human Resources Department and all levels of management are responsible for administration of this Policy.

IV. RECOMMENDED PROCEDURES

- A. Purpose:** The purpose of the progressive counseling process is to provide clear direction for improving performance and/or behavior. Through the effective use of progressive counseling, Associates will be provided with notice of issues with their performance or conduct. This provides management and Associates the opportunity to correct the situation.

Progressive counseling is a system of corrective action steps administered in a timely and consistent manner which uses increasing severity for repeated infractions or permits bypassing steps (at Company discretion)

B. Steps in the Process:

1. Since progressive counseling is based on the premise that Associates are aware of expected performance and acceptable behavior/conduct, it is recommended that coaching/counseling by the Associate's Manager has occurred prior to taking any of the progressive counseling steps.

When a Manager coaches an Associate, the Manager should document the time and date of the meeting and all pertinent facts discussed. All progressive counseling(s) should be documented in advance of discussing them with the Associate. An Associate Counseling Report should be used for all progressive counseling and discharges. Associate name, date, operation, and location should be completed on the Associate Counseling Report.

Each progressive counseling should include an explanation of the purpose of the counseling and/or the work rule that has been violated.

In a private setting, the Manager should discuss the unsatisfactory performance and the expected standards. The Manager should review the details noted on the progressive counseling and ensure that the Associate understands the expected performance and time period to improve. The Associate is to be asked for a commitment to improve. The Associate is then asked to sign the form indicating the Associate received the counseling session. Signing the form does not necessarily imply agreement. If the Associate chooses not to sign, the Manager should indicate on the form “the Associate declined to sign”. Another member of management should witness that the Associate refused to sign.

2. Progressive Counseling Steps

When coaching has not resulted in a significant improvement in performance or conduct, the following documented steps should be followed:

- a. First Progressive Counseling**
- b. Second Progressive Counseling**
- c. Final Progressive Counseling/Suspension**
- d. Discharge**

Skipping Steps – Depending on the nature or type of the conduct or performance issue, step(s) may be skipped. If the offense or performance deficiency is of such a magnitude that continued employment cannot be tolerated, discharge, as described above may occur without any of the above steps having been taken. Such a discharge is within a Manager’s sole discretion, but such discharge should be supported by Human Resources unless such support is not possible due to extenuating or unforeseeable circumstances.

NOTE: During an Associate’s first ninety (90) days of employment, the documented steps may be modified as follows:

- (1) First Offense – Final Progressive Counseling**
- (2) Second Offense - Discharge**

C. Description of Steps

- 1. First Progressive Counseling** – The first step of the progressive counseling process may be given to an Associate without prior discussion. The Associate should be asked for their commitment to improve. The Associate should sign the form to indicate the session was held. The counseling should be filed in the Associate’s personnel file along with the original documentation.
- 2. Second Progressive Counseling** – If improvement has not occurred within the agreed time period or if there is a new behavior or performance problem, the Manager will complete a second progressive counseling (or final progressive counseling if the second progressive counseling has already taken place). Again, the Associate should be asked for their commitment to improve. The Associate should sign the form to indicate the

session was held. The counseling should be filed in the Associate's personnel file along with the original documentation.

3. **Final Progressive Counseling** – After the second progressive counseling, if improvement has not occurred or if there is a new behavior or performance problem, the Manager will complete a final progressive counseling. The Manager should tell the Associate that if the Associate's performance does not improve to an acceptable level within the established time frame, discharge will result.

Again, the Associate should be asked for their commitment to improve. The Associate should sign the progressive counseling form to indicate the session was held. The counseling should be filed in the Associate's personnel file along with the original documentation.

4. **Discharge** – If the performance level is unacceptable, the Manager will detail this in the Associate Counseling Report. This report and discharge should be supported in advance by Human Resources. A senior level (SVP or above) Human Resources Manager should review all discharges of VP/RVPs and above. If immediate contact with Human Resources is not possible, the Associate receiving the counseling should be placed on paid administrative leave pending review with Human Resources. The actual discharge should be communicated by the Manager with another member of management to witness. After the details of the Associate Counseling Report are discussed with the Associate, the Associate will be told their employment is terminated.

- D. **Sequence of Progressive Counseling Steps** – A separate sequence of progressive counseling steps need not be used for each and every different kind of performance problem that an Associate is having unless state law dictates otherwise, however, any discipline related to absenteeism and/or tardiness should be treated independently of any other disciplinary issues.

The progressive counseling process is to be administered on a rolling twelve (12) month period. Progressive counseling reports older than one (1) year should generally not be included in the step process leading to discharge, however depending on the nature of the performance or behavioral issue, progressive counseling reports older than one (1) year may be considered. **All progressive counseling reports regardless of date of issue should remain in the Associate's personnel file.**

- E. **Review Process** – If an Associate wants a review of the contents of the progressive counseling, it should be presented in writing to the next level Manager or HR Advice & Guidance within five (5) working days of the Associate's receipt of the progressive counseling.

- F. **Paid Administrative Leave** – Paid Administrative Leave may be used:

1. Pending investigation inclusive of the documentation accumulated during the progressive discipline process if discharge is the next and final step of discipline.
2. If an Associate is suspected of committing a serious violation which may result in discharge as the next and final step of discipline and time is required to investigate and confirm the suspicions prior to affecting the discharge.

3. If the Associate's continued presence would impede the normal course of an investigation into serious allegations of the Associate's performance or conduct which, if proven, may result in discharge as the next and final step of discipline.

The investigation should be completed within five (5) working days of commencement of the paid administrative leave (but no more than ten (10) working days if approved by Human Resources and/or the next level Manager). If Human Resources determines as a result of the investigation that the Associate did not commit an offense or the offense is not serious enough to warrant discharge, the Associate will be immediately returned to work.

When practical, management should notify Human Resources and the next level Manager *prior* to placing a salaried exempt or non-exempt Associate on paid administrative leave. In all cases, Human Resources and the next level Manager should be notified when a salaried exempt or non-exempt Associate has been placed on paid administrative leave.

End of Policy