

The Counseling Session and Memo

The Counseling Process

How to Plan and Prepare for Counseling

Effective counseling begins with planning and scheduling. Review the procedure below for planning your counseling session.

1. Plan your counseling session

- Define your objectives for the session – write down what you hope to accomplish.
- Have all documentation available.
- Review the facts.
- Make an outline to be sure you cover all the points of concern.
- Schedule a time when you will not be disturbed.
- Arrange for a place where you can meet in private.

2. Verbally inform the employee

- Let the employee know what the meeting will be about, as well as where and when it will be held. Do this in private and in person.

3. Schedule the meeting on your calendar

- Mark the date on your calendar so there will be no scheduling conflict.

Guideline 1 – Set a Positive Tone for the Session

Counseling is a process for helping the employee identify performance and/or behavior problems, and then find a solution. Setting the proper tone will help accomplish this.

- Welcome the employee.
- Tell the employee he or she is here for a counseling session.
- Explain the purpose of the meeting.
- Be yourself. Act in a manner consistent with your normal demeanor.
- Try to control your emotions and reactions.
- Remember, a counseling session is a problem-solving session. You are not there to attack or punish the employee.
- Focus on the behavior of the employee, not the employee's "character" or "morality."
- Don't use judgmental language.



Guideline 2- Clearly Describe the Problem or Improvement Opportunity

After you have welcomed the employee to the counseling session and have explained why he or she is there, stick to the facts. Avoid sharing opinions and don't get personal.

- Be direct and clear.
- Talk about the behavior you have observed.
- Describe the problem in concrete terms, using specific examples.
- Explain how the employee's behavior affects others.
- Explain rules, policies, and expectations regarding the performance.
- Make sure the employee understands what is expected in the future.

Guideline 3 - Ask, Then Listen

Counseling is not one-way; it is a two-way, face-to-face communication. Be sure to give the employee ample and reasonable opportunity to respond.

- Ask for the employee's response.
- Listen to the employee's perspective on the situation.
- Ask open-ended questions.
- Keep an open mind during the counseling session. If the discussion reveals your information was incorrect, or the employee's explanation is satisfactory, say so to the employee.

Guideline 4 – Identify Options for Correcting the Situation

Once you have established a rapport with the employee by identifying the problem area, explore with him or her ways to improve or correct the situation.

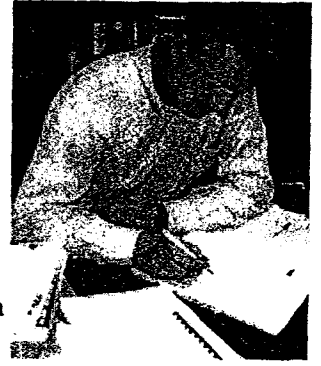
- Reinforce expectations.
- Discuss ways to improve.
- Encourage the employee's suggestions for correcting the situation.
- Make the employee aware of other resources, such as EAP.
- Establish a performance improvement plan with the employee.
- Include clear expectations and a date for a follow-up session.

Guideline 5 – Take Notes

If you have properly prepared for the counseling session, you'll have your "plan of action" in front of you. Take notes during the dialogue. Notes are invaluable, they can:

- Refresh your memory about what occurred in the session and the actions upon which you and the employee agreed.
- Help you summarize the session with the employee.
- Form the basis for the counseling memo, if you decide a memo is appropriate.

Minimizing Conflict During Counseling



Counseling is personal and private, and there is no guaranteed formula for success. During counseling, it is important to use good judgment. There may be times when the employee becomes hostile. You can minimize this by being pro-active and showing sincere interest in working with the employee to resolve the problem.

Here are some things you can do to minimize conflict:

- Counsel in a timely manner.
- Look for the root cause of the problem.
- Let the employee talk.
- Listen. Don't interrupt.
- Show sincere interest in the employee.
- If you can help, offer it. If you offer it, do it.

Concluding the Session

The conclusion of the counseling session is the time to review and summarize key points from the meeting. This is critical.

- Summarize the meeting to ensure understanding.
- Inform the employee if the counseling session will be documented in writing and placed in his or her Personal History Folder.

The Last Step in the Counseling Process

The last step in the counseling process is to decide whether or not to write a counseling memo. A counseling memo is a structured account of the counseling session, detailing what was said and by whom. It summarizes the performance improvement process and notes when the follow-up session will be held. You must tell the employee during the counseling session if you will be writing a counseling memo which will be placed in his or her Personal History Folder.

When making the decision about whether or not to write a counseling memo, consider if any of the following are present:

- Previous counseling has failed to bring improvement.
- You have little or no confidence that the employee will correct the problem without further encouragement.
- The seriousness of the situation requires it, or
- A multi-step plan for improvement is designed and the memo can serve as a written confirmation and reminder.



Counseling Checklist for Supervisors

Good planning and follow-up can help you avoid many common pitfalls in counseling. The following checklist can help you prepare.

- 1. ___ Does the employee know what is supposed to be done and by when?**
- 2. ___ Does the employee have the information/skills/resources needed to do the job?**
- 3. ___ Have I adequately defined the job performance expectations?**
- 4. ___ Does the problem have an adverse effect on the employee? coworkers/team? unit? agency? on me as a supervisor?**
- 5. ___ Are any obstacles beyond the employee's control getting in the way?**
- 6. ___ Have I been inadvertently rewarding poor performance by my silence or behavior?**
- 7. ___ Is anyone else exhibiting the same problem?**
- 8. ___ Is there a pattern with this employee?**
- 9. ___ Have I contacted my employee relations office for guidance?**