

The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Discipline!

Disciplinary action is traditionally understood to be a mechanism to fix people behaviours in organisations when they have gone wrong. The consequence over time is that it has become a managerial responsibility to be feared and avoided, not only because of the perceived legal barriers, but also because it has become an uncomfortable and destructive moment.

There are good reasons for the failure of our disciplinary systems, and our experience is rather in how we go about it, rather than the action itself. In a previous article we discussed the importance of focussing on the reasons for disciplinary action rather than becoming obsessed by the legalism that has surrounded it.

In this first of two follow-up provocations, we share three of the critical seven success factors in good discipline.

One: Discipline does not start when things go wrong! Disciplinary action is the set of actions that managers should be taking all the time to prevent things going wrong in the first instance. In a way, when a manager is compelled to take formal disciplinary steps, discipline has already failed! Be sure to induct new employees into the ways of the organisation, and to the standards you intend to apply to your teams efforts. Focus on the organisation and its needs to compete.

Two: Discipline should not be the exercise of RULES, but rather of STANDARDS. Employees who understand rules generally act to meet the requirements of those rules. In other words, they apply minimum standards to their behaviours. So long as they are avoiding doing the wrong thing, they are satisfied they must therefore be doing the right thing! How wrong can you be! Instead managers should be directing employees around the standards that the organisation strives for, and which are needed to differentiate from the competition. This enables employees to look forward to the behaviours that will achieve organisational goals, and not spend their time looking over their shoulders at whether they are compliant.

Three: Disciplinary Policy must therefore also focus around standards, not rules. Rules must be understood to be the mechanisms to support standards, not the driver of those standards. An employee must not come to work on time because the rules dictate he must, but because his team is relying on his contribution. The Disciplinary Code that an organisation puts forward should therefore look to the organisational goals / mission, and identify the standards necessary to make that mission a reality. The code of Conduct is therefore not about what an employee has to do, or not do, but rather a set of behaviours that will make the organisation better than the rest. Deviations from those standards then

become the behaviours which are discouraged and against which disciplinary action is mounted.

In our October article we will conclude our insights into the management of effective and orientated discipline.

Michael Jarvis is an Associate Director with Work Dynamics in Port Elizabeth. For more information, call him on 041 374 4233, michael@workdynamics.co.za.

473 words in body