

***Discipline means  
not always having to  
say “You’re fired.”***

**A Sample Guide and its Limits**

Figure 6.1 is a diagram that suggests the steps of a system and the types of offense that would trigger various disciplinary actions on first occurrence. It includes lists of both standards and measures, and it embodies the principle of progressive discipline. More serious offenses are met with stronger measures. Repeated offenses of any type lead to discharge. A farmer could easily modify this sample by redefining or regrouping offenses into different categories, adding or eliminating a step in the progressive series, or linking offense categories with different steps for first-time occurrences.

**Figure 6.1. Guide for disciplinary action.**



A policy statement in the employee handbook or on a bulletin board is not all that is needed to establish discipline and guide responses to problems. No matter how long and detailed the policy may be, incidents that it does not cover explicitly are bound to arise. Labeling offenses as “*examples* of unacceptable performance,” as in the sample policy presented in Figure 6.2, implies that other actions also may trigger sanctions.

*Suppose a young, brash, tractor driver has been complaining every day to an absolutely crackerjack mechanic about some clank in his engine that he says the mechanic should have fixed. Frustration leads to ego involvement and insults, until finally the mechanic loses his cool and actually takes a poke at the driver. The policy is to terminate people for fighting. Would you fire him?*



The second reason why such a policy guide is not enough is that managers often need some elbow room to vary responses in accordance with the context and individual circumstances. A little uncertainty about where a given behavior fits in the discipline scheme provides it. Right or wrong, it is very common to give more lenient treatment to workers who possess excellent or scarce skills, have longer records of satisfactory service, are known to be coping with personal problems, might have somehow been influenced or provoked by management into the unacceptable behavior, and pose no threat to managerial authority. Flexibility to vary disciplinary action with respect to these considerations can be built in by leaving unspecified the normal step to take on a first occurrence of a given offense.

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**Managers need  
elbow room and  
judgment.**

The third reason why no diagram or written policy is enough to guide disciplinary action is the flip side of the second. Even explicit, detailed policies leave much to the judgment and art of the supervisor. Most everyday problems and correction opportunities call for informal discussion, which can be conducted in many different ways. Foremen have far more occasion to counsel workers than to mete out cautionary notices and pink slips, and how they do it matters.

The chart in Figure 6.1 (or any similarly specific one) is best used only as a guide to thinking about discipline and discussing it with supervisors, not as a document to be distributed to all employees. More practical for inclusion in a handbook or general distribution to workers is a policy statement of the type shown in Figure 6.2, which preserves more room for case-by-case action. Greater detail on topics of specific concern or regulatory consequence, such as security inspections, intoxication, and sexual harassment, can be provided in additional policies.

Figure 6.2. Sample discipline policy.

### **Employee Conduct and Work Rules**

To ensure orderly operations and provide the best possible work environment, the management of this farm expects employees to conduct themselves in a manner that protects the interests and safety of all persons here, as well as the farm in general.

It is not possible to list all the forms of behavior that would violate this general standard and be considered unacceptable in our operation. The following are examples of conduct that may result in disciplinary action, including formal warning, suspension, and termination of employment:

- Theft or inappropriate removal or use of company property
- Falsification of time or production records
- Working under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs
- Possession, distribution, sale, transfer, or use of alcohol or illegal drugs in the workplace, while on duty, or while operating employer-owned vehicles or equipment
- Fighting or threatening violence in the workplace
- Negligence or improper conduct leading to damage of employer-owned property
- Insubordination or other disrespectful conduct
- Violation of safety or health rules
- Sexual or other unlawful harassment
- Unauthorized absence from ranch during the workday
- Unsatisfactory performance or work output

