

Developing a Written Warning

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When an employee is not meeting performance standards for their position, and have not responded to your coaching, it may be time to document current performance and what you expect of them going forward. Most people refer to this document as a written warning. This document can take many forms but is necessary to clearly articulate acceptable performance and your expectations. Although the employee will likely see this as a negative action it can be the basis for the development of a productive employee. A documented written warning will also help support a case for termination if there is no improvement.

Often the frustrations as a manager are pretty high by the time you get to the stage of needing to put performance standards in writing. Make sure you look at this as a positive versus punitive step. Obviously your desired outcome is to get the employee back on track and direct your attention to other aspects of your business.

The following general outline may assist you when needing to document performance concerns. However, if your organization has a “disciplinary action” or “progressive discipline” policy you will want to make sure you follow the stated process and guidelines.

I recommend a “written warning” contain the following information:

Heading:

This section should include the date written as well as information related to the employee - name, position title, date of hire, etc.

First Paragraph

Describe why the written warning is being prepared. This should include the date, actions, behaviors, etc. which took place that were inappropriate or substandard in performance.

Example:

On March 10th you were to complete the reconciliation of XYZ accounts and develop a spreadsheet outlining any discrepancies found. By March 13th this task was not done and I had to question you repeatedly for this information.

Second Paragraph

Indicate that this document serves as a written warning and why the action or behavior is inappropriate or creates substandard performance. Is the behavior or action is a violation of your policies or procedures, reference them in the warning.

Example:

As indicated when you were hired, part of your responsibilities included completing monthly reconciliations on time. This task has been explained to you several times, and you are fully trained, however, the last two months it has not been done on time. You have demonstrated that you can complete this process on time in the past.

Third Paragraph

This paragraph should indicate your expectations for future performance and what will happen if the substandard performance or unacceptable behavior continues. I encourage including a date to check for improvement.

Example:

You are expected to perform all the duties and responsibilities of your position in an accurate and timely manner, to include monthly reconciliations. I encourage you to give this your immediate attention. I will expect next month's reconciliation to be done on time. Performance which continues to fall below expectations may result to further disciplinary actions, up to and including termination.

Closing

This section should include an area where the employee and you, as manager, can sign and date the document as well as an area for comments, should the employee care to make them. Above the signature line you may want to indicate the following statement

My signature below indicates acknowledgement that I received a copy of this written warning and it has been discussed with me. My signature may not indicate agreement with its content.

After you have completed your meeting with the employee, keep a copy of the document in your personnel file.

Depending on the complexity of the circumstances you may want guidance for a human resource professional on what to include and how to language the actions or behaviors. If you suspect the employee's actions may escalate to future legal action, I encourage you to contact your attorney. However if you need assistance with employee relations concerns give me a call. Cecelia Keenan, Human Resource Consulting, LLC, 763-370-4280