

# What steps should we take to ensure supervisors issue consistent discipline?

**Q. We are having a hard time keeping discipline consistent between supervisors. One supervisor regularly issues warnings, while another ignores misconduct. Some employees are starting to complain that they are not being treated equally. To promote consistency, upper management would like to implement a new discipline policy setting out what disciplinary steps should be followed. Do you recommend this?**

**A.** Consistency is a good goal, particularly given anti-discrimination laws, but you should avoid an overly detailed, rigid discipline policy that might limit your flexibility and discretion.

If you adopt a disciplinary policy, make clear that the company ultimately has the discretion to decide what discipline is appropriate and to immediately terminate employment at any time. In addition, train managers on how to discipline and terminate employees.

Also consider a checks-and-balances system so no one supervisor makes disciplinary decisions on his or her own.

Requiring a supervisor to involve a higher-level manager or HR professional in a disciplinary decision can help promote the greater consistency you are seeking. The reviewing individual will have the broader picture of what actions have been taken in various departments and can help ensure that discipline is consistent and based on facts, not emotion.

Furthermore, the reviewing individual can ask important questions that uncover any possible issues that could undermine a disciplinary decision. For example, if a supervisor wants to fire someone for failing to call in an absence for the third time, the reviewer might ask the supervisor, "Have you checked your voicemail?" This final once-over can be critical if a court or unemployment law judge ever questions the termination.