

10 'don'ts' of employee discipline

Samuel Spitalli will never forget the day an angry teacher walked into his office and threw down a notebook in which a student had written 1,000 times, "I promise never to say in P.E. again."

The teacher wanted Spitalli, the new assistant principal, to do something about the student's continued profanity. Spitalli wanted to tell the teacher he'd done enough damage by having the student repeat that very profanity 1,000 times.

This same idiocy plays out in workplaces, too. Leaders have tremendous power to inspire and encourage, but some techniques actually undermine performance.

Here's Spitalli's list of 10 no-nos:

1. **Don't punish the many for the transgressions of the few.** A company president we know actually slashed sick leave to three days a year for all employees because one had abused sick leave ... and the offending employee had already quit.
2. **Don't use work as punishment.** What better way to show that work is bad than piling it on?
3. **Don't bully.** New research shows that bosses undermine employees' confidence when they tease, insult and ridicule.
4. **Don't lower evaluations as punishment.** People's marks should reflect their work performance.
5. **Don't coerce people.** Forcing adults to do work they don't want to do is just as pointless as forcing students to regurgitate rules or facts.
6. **Don't use profanity.** If you don't want employees to use profanity, don't use it yourself. It's unprofessional.
7. **Don't rant and rave.** Also unprofessional.
8. **Don't be sarcastic.** It shows lack of respect.
9. **Don't discipline people for inconsequential infractions.** If you can't deal with day-to-day irritants, you'll never earn respect.
10. **Don't make them repeat unacceptable language.** As in "What did you say?" See No. 6.

— Adapted from "Class Struggles," Samuel J. Spitalli, *American School Board Journal*.