

Common Myths of Managing at UF



Podcast Transcript

Hi, I'm Courtney Moon with UF Training & Organizational Development. Let's set straight some of the common myths of managing employees at UF.

Myth 1:

"Sometimes people behave badly at work, but as long as they're doing their job, there is nothing I can (or should) do about it."

Do not allow people to perform or behave poorly without making it clear that their performance or behavior is unacceptable. If you allow employees to behave poorly, then you are sending a signal to them that you will tolerate inappropriate behavior—and other employees will notice this as well. Types of "bad behavior" that can occur in the workplace include:

- Angry outbursts
- Inappropriate comments
- Refusal to work with others
- Not speaking to/ignoring colleagues
- Poor Attendance

Many problems in the workplace result from the fact that employees are different. They have different expectations, work experience, and demographics. Sometimes problems occur because certain behaviors have been tolerated or overlooked. Leaders need to be proactive in preventing problems by:

- Clearly verbalizing expectations
- Developing a positive workplace culture by modeling what's expected

They also need to respond promptly and directly in the event problems do occur. It's important to give feedback that:

- Reinforces desirable or positive behavior
- Feedback that redirects when a different behavior is needed or expected

Effective feedback is...

- Accurate, in that it states objective facts as they occurred and reports direct observations—avoiding “hearsay”.
- Behavioral, meaning it relates to specific job-related behavior—avoiding evaluative statements or comments regarding the individual’s personality.
- Next, it’s timely. Give the feedback as close as possible to the time that the act in question occurred. Time can dull memories and details; give redirection or reinforcement while the events are still fresh for everyone involved.
- Lastly, effective feedback is continual—this means that you’re giving feedback to your employees on a regular basis, not saving it all up for once a year during the performance appraisal.

Myth 2:

“You can’t fire anyone at UF”

It is important to realize that disciplinary procedures are meant to correct and improve performance, not punish an employee. The University of Florida has a Progressive Discipline policy, which provides a process for helping employees understand and correct violations. It also enables the university to take serious action when necessary—which can include dismissal. Following (and documenting!) each step of the process will help to ensure that a discharge is fair and will stand up to legal scrutiny.

The steps of the progressive disciplinary process are:

- Oral Reprimand
- Written Reprimand
- Suspension
- Dismissal

Sometimes a letter of counseling may be recommended prior to beginning progressive discipline. The specifics of the process depend upon the conduct and the employee’s pay plan.

The university seeks to ensure each disciplinary action is taken with “just cause.” For TEAMS employees just cause for progressive discipline occurs in three categories.

- Unsatisfactory attendance
- Incompetence
- Misconduct, whether on or off the job

Non-reappointment occurs when a person is not a good fit in their position (not considered disciplinary). For USPS employees “just cause” for progressive discipline may occur in the following four categories:

- Unsatisfactory attendance
- Misconduct
- Negligence
- Violation of provision of law, university rule, or departmental policy, procedure, or practice

Performance is addressed through evaluations.

A TEAMS employee who has successfully completed his or her probationary period, or a USPS employee who is not currently in a probationary status, may be eligible to appeal some actions to an independent arbitrator. Appealable actions include:

- Suspension
- Dismissal
- Layoff
- Demotion with reduction in pay
- Job abandonment
- Reduction in pay

Just like every other employment practice, the key to successful discipline is to act fairly, consistently, and legally (and don’t forget to document!). While the majority of UF employees never need discipline, exceptions do occur. Supervisors and administrators must respond to violations fairly and consistently in order to protect employees and keep the university functioning efficiently. Your employee relations representative is available to answer any questions you have and provide you with support through the process and don’t forget—they must review all disciplinary actions.

Myth 3:

“There isn’t a need to set standards associated with workplace behavior. We’re all adults.”

Actually, we are not all adults—and even adults can misbehave at times. Some misbehaviors are short-term and treatable; others are long-term and perhaps intransigent. Not everyone internalizes professional standards or acts on them all the time. So why set standards?

- Short- and long-term misbehaviors harm everyone—not just the person in the immediate line of fire. Long-term misbehavior by one person can poison a department, and everyone feels the ripple effects of it, including customers and stakeholders.
- That’s why standards are your friend—in fact; clearly articulated expectations create a climate of fairness and can provide support for necessary actions.

Written policies help clarify expectations. Common policies for staff include attendance and leave use, dress codes, and cell phone use. Also, ensure that there are guidelines for workplace behavior—uphold ethical and professional standards and treat people civilly.

The downside to believing these myths exist is that it keeps managers from taking the appropriate action or steps to correct a problem. The key is to learn the rules, and to learn what is in your control to do. Being an effective manager is not always an easy job—but it is possible and within your reach!