Discipline and Documentation, Part III

By L. Douglas Mault

This is the third article in this series. In it we'll discuss how to construct a good documentation memorandum. In order to be effective, a documentation memorandum should contain specific information regarding the following.

**When did it happen?** The memo must indicate when the action or omission occurred. The actual time is often a critical factor.

**Where did the incident occur?** The place of infraction is usually an important detail.

**What actually happened?** This must be a specific narrative that includes place, time, sequence of events and other pertinent facts. This should be a detailed report.

**What is wrong?** It is often necessary to give the employee notice of the infraction/deficiency. This should include any relevant reference to specific rules, procedures or policies. This serves to prevent future misunderstandings.

**What must be done?** It is necessary to give the employee specific direction as to the proper conduct or level of performance expected. This should leave no room for misunderstanding or doubt. Avoid terms such as “request,” “would like,” “ask” and “etc.” The memorandum should be written as a directive rather than as a request. Requests are easy to ignore or deny, directives are not.

**Future consequences.** The employee must be made aware that future infractions (commission or omission) will not be tolerated and that continued failure in these or other critical areas will be grounds for further disciplinary actions. These actions can include termination.

Here is an example of a documentation memo that follows the key steps outlined above:

**TO:** Tom Jones  
**FROM:** Albert Finney  
**SUBJECT:** Written Warning  
**DATE:** 04/10/03

As we discussed this morning, in the eight months that you have been with us, you have been late on 12 separate occasions, ranging from 10 minutes to 45 minutes. We have spoken about this problem three times in the past 6 months, and your behavior has failed to improve. Since our last conversation four weeks ago, you have been late three times, including the occasion when you were 45 minutes late.

As I pointed out, your lateness creates problems for our crew, since others must pick up the slack. In addition, when you do arrive, others must bring you up-to-speed about what they have done, thereby increasing the amount of time they lose from their own work.

You indicated that you would either join a new carpool or find alternate transportation in your effort to solve the problem. I trust that you will be able to follow through on these suggestions, since, except for lateness, you are a good employee.

This memo is, and must be considered by you, a written warning in your effort to solve the problem. I trust that you will be able to follow through on these suggestions, since, except for lateness, you are a good employee.

**About the Author**  
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