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Human resource managers know that documentation of problems early and often is critical to the disciplinary process. Unfortunately, supervisors are often too focused on production, profitability, and everything else except employee issues. And most supervisors are uncomfortable putting issues in writing or engaging in confrontational situations—even minor ones—with employees. They needed to be “encouraged” to do so. One of my fast food clients with multiple locations addressed this reality with an effective strategy.


The company’s Operations Manager had separate weekly 30-minute calls with each of nine Store Managers. They covered labor costs, inventory, loss control and other typical operations issues. Only about five minutes were devoted to employee issues, but that was sufficient. During each five-minute segment, the Operations Manager asked if there were any problems, even minor, with any employee. They used a checklist covering several issues, such as attendance, conflict with customers or co-workers, appearance, product and equipment knowl-

edge, etc. The Store Manager briefly considered each category for each employee. The Operations Manager was tuned in to when the Store Manager was glossing over the categories or employees, and made sure to press the Store Manager to seriously consider the topics. Over time the Store Managers learned to give thoughtful consideration to the questions. They eventually embraced the concept because they knew that in the long run their input would only make their jobs easier and stores run smoother.

The Operations Manager noted any comments in the store file notes. In the next week’s call, any previously noted issues were addressed: “Any further problem’s on Joe’s attendance you mentioned last week?” or “Is Mary still complaining about her wrist?” If so, the Operations Manager immediately acted. For performance issues, he prepared the appropriate memo or write-up (or had the human resource manager handle it). For disability issues, he (or HR) immediately began working with the Store Manager and the employee. If the situation escalated, they addressed accommodation

issues and began documenting the all-important interactive dialogue. This minimized delays or improper handling of such claims.

This process took some of the burden off the Store Manager, and it put issues in front of HR sooner than later, generally making it easier to deal with such problems. It didn’t take much time, but the Store Managers knew they could count on the Operations Manager and HR to help them address issues directly with employees when needed, and document those issues in an appropriate fashion.

Owners or human resource managers might consider implementing some form of their own regular contact system with supervisors to identify and timely handle HR issues. The end result is that operations will run smoother, supervisors will learn to have confidence in the process and be more comfortable with documentation and interaction with employees on these issues, and employees will benefit from learning about problems earlier than later. A win-win for everyone. 

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