

Disciplinary Action Rules for Supervisors and Managers

For inexperienced supervisors or managers who are having difficulty applying disciplinary action, here is an easy-to-remember and easy-to-follow set of rules for applying discipline.

There is a simple rule—easy to remember and to follow—that will help your supervisors apply disciplinary action. It is called the “Hot Stove Rule,” and it compares the disciplinary process to touching a hot stove. Discipline, just as the result of touching a hot stove, must follow a warning and must be immediate, consistent and impersonal.

Following the rule, disciplinary action must:

- Occur after a warning has been ignored—just as a burn occurs from ignoring the warning a hot stove gives.
- Occur immediately—just as a hot stove burns immediately.
- Be consistent—just as a hot stove burns every time.
- Be impersonal in that it occurs regardless of who the person is—just as a hot stove burns any and every person who touches it.

In addition to following the Hot Stove Rule, supervisors need to include the following when verbally addressing and subsequently documenting disciplinary action:

- The employer's expectations for performance, job duties, appropriate behavior or conduct for the individual employee and in general for all employees (such as professional conduct).
- The employee's performance that is deficient and/or behavior or conduct that is substandard.
- A plan for improvement with specific objectives.
- A timeline for improvement and another review to determine if improvement has occurred.
- Repercussions if the employee fails to make improvement or continues dissatisfactory performance or unacceptable behavior or conduct.

You would also want to let your supervisors and managers know that you are available to assist with any questions or situations regarding disciplinary action. For particularly sensitive cases where termination is being considered, you would also want to contact your HR Representative for definitive guidance.