

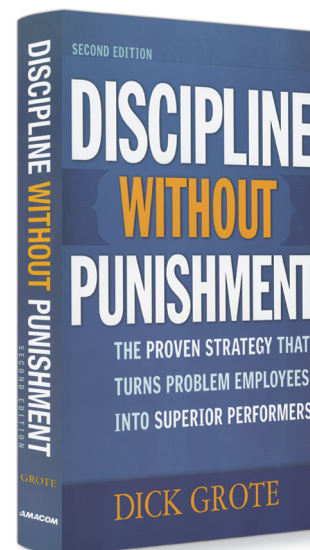


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Executive Book Summaries®

Discipline Without Punishment

The Proven Strategy that Turns Problem Employees into Superior Performers



by Dick Grote

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

More than 30 years ago, Dick Grote developed a powerful, nonpunitive discipline system that turned a troubled Frito-Lay plant from a hotbed of employee sabotage and toxic relations into a productive, respectful environment — one where employees took personal responsibility for their behavior, and managers helped problem employees become productive players.

Grote's method gained national recognition with the release of *Discipline Without Punishment*. The book has become a management classic, helping thousands of companies and managers move to a responsibility-based approach for handling unacceptable performance and problem behaviors. But many companies continue to cling to their long-established system of verbal warnings, written reprimands, suspensions without pay and probationary periods — all fear-based approaches that instill lots of resentment, with little or no payback in improved performance.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to become better at confronting a subordinate with the need to change.
- The procedures for Reminder 1 and Reminder 2 steps of the Discipline Without Punishment process.
- Why Positive Contacts are essential to improving employee performance.
- Tips to prepare for and conduct a performance improvement conversation.

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: DISCIPLINE WITHOUT PUNISHMENT

by Dick Grote

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The Birth of Discipline Without Punishment

For some 75 years, American organizations have been using a standard procedure to handle lapses from organizational discipline. This approach, “progressive discipline,” is described by attorney James R. Redeker as such because its “purpose is to correct behavior through progressively more severe penalties.”

The traditional progressive-discipline system was created by unions. In the 1930s, unions demanded that companies eliminate summary terminations and instead develop a progressive system of penalties that would provide an employee with a new benefit — protection against losing his job without first being fully aware that his job was at risk.

The basic premise of the traditional progressive-discipline system is that crime must be followed by punishment. This system almost perfectly parallels America’s system for handling criminal deviants, and it works no better than the criminal justice system works in transforming lawbreakers into responsible citizens.

Problems with a Punishment-based System

The use of punishment produces side effects and long-term consequences — anger, apathy, resentment, frustration — that end up being far more costly than whatever the original misbehavior might have been.

The new system retained the progressive aspect of the traditional approach but redesigned all of the steps of the system to eliminate punishment. Instead, the new system concentrates on personal responsibility and decision-making.

The New System

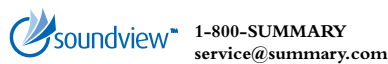
The Discipline Without Punishment approach redesigns all of the steps of the old system to eliminate punishment and concentrate on personal responsibility and decision making.

To begin, the Discipline Without Punishment approach includes “Positive Contacts” as a formal element of the system. Including “Positive Contacts” tells managers that recognizing good performance is as important as confronting poor performance.

Most supervisors see coaching as part of their ordinary day-in, day-out responsibilities for managing people. These coaching sessions tend to be casual, spur-of-the-moment discussions aimed at showing someone how to do her job better or immediately correcting some minor problem.

Instead of being spontaneous and spur of the moment, a Performance Improvement Discussion requires the supervisor to make notes in advance of the meeting and conduct it with all of the seriousness of a formal disciplinary transaction but to advise the employee that the matter is still between the two of them. The purpose of the Performance Improvement Discussion is to avoid the need for any more serious action.

The “verbal warning” and “written warning” have been renamed. The first step of disciplinary action has become a Reminder 1. Instead of being reprimanded for what he had done, the individual is now reminded of two things: the company’s expectations and the employee’s personal responsibility. The purpose of the supervisor’s discussion is not to deliver a reprimand or warning; instead it is to make sure that the employee fully understands what is expected and that it is his responsibility to deliver.



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The second step of the procedure is called Reminder 2. It almost exactly parallels the first step. The supervisor again meets with the individual privately, reviews the situation and in a serious and businesslike way reminds him of both the performance expectation and his responsibility for meeting it. Because the situation has now become more serious, he is told that he will be receiving a memo after the meeting documenting the transaction. While this memo will be placed in his personnel file, he can earn the right to have it deactivated and removed if he goes one year with no further disciplinary problems.

Decision Making Leave

The most remarkable change comes in the final step of the new procedure: the Decision Making Leave. This is a one-day disciplinary suspension. While the employee would be paid for this day, he would be required to use it in both his and the company's best interests. He must use the day off to think about whether he really wants to work with the company. On the day following the suspension, he must return with a final decision: either to solve the immediate problem and make a commitment to totally acceptable performance in all areas of his job or decide that working for the company was not for him, quit and go find more suitable employment elsewhere.

The traditional progressive-discipline system takes a problem employee, punishes him and leaves the organization with a punished problem employee. The Discipline Without Punishment system requires the problem employee to become one of two things: either a good employee or an ex-employee. ●

PART I: BUILDING SUPERIOR PERFORMANCE

Recognizing Good Performance

The Discipline Without Punishment system begins by recognizing that the overall objective of the enterprise's discipline system should properly be the development of well-disciplined individuals who are committed to the organization, its mission, its values and its vision. As a result, the first element of Discipline Without Punishment is Positive Contacts, the recognition of good performance and the development of motivation. In essence, "Behavior rewarded is behavior repeated."

Reinforcing Good Performance

Our greatest opportunity for increasing overall organizational performance lies with our solid, competent

performers. And the best way to spur performance improvement is to make sure that we provide a positive consequence — recognition — whenever it happens.

Our challenge is to find examples of good performance to recognize. Somewhere between the parameters of barely acceptable and genuinely heroic are hundreds of people who are simply doing their jobs just a little better than they have to. If we actively seek out this level of performance, we will discover an abundance of it.

The single most important guideline for using Positive Contacts as a tool to influence good performance is, do it often. Positive Contacts are most influential when they rapidly follow the behavior being reinforced.

Recognition Tools

Managers have many tools at their disposal to use in arranging for positive consequences for good performance. They include, among other tools,

- Assigning the individual to work on a more desirable job;
- Buying her a cup of coffee;
- Ordering the individual their own business cards;
- Letting him take an extended lunch;
- Asking his advice about a business-related matter;
- Writing her a memo commending a job well done.

But of all these, the most important are the sincere and genuine words that come out of the manager's mouths: "Well done," "Thanks" or "I genuinely appreciate that."

Recognizing good performance — arranging positive consequences to increase the frequency of desired behavior — is not a way of being nice to one's workers and increasing one's popularity. It is a practical, tough-minded and demanding management tool to influence people's behavior on the job.

To use positive reinforcement effectively, we must not only provide it actively to those whose performance justifies our providing it, but we must also withhold it from those whose performance does not. Managers have no difficulty agreeing that positive consequences should be provided to those whose performance qualifies them for it. They have enormous difficulty accepting the corollary of that statement: that the intangible rewards of organizational life should consciously be withheld from those who have yet to earn it. ●

Solving People Problems

For an organization to enjoy universal high performance, it must recognize the good performance delivered by the great majority of organization members. The more

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that the manager provides positive consequences (Positive Contacts) for good performance, the more likely it is that good performance will be delivered. In spite of any action that managers take, however, people problems will still arise. Some performance problems can easily be defined in a specific and measurable way. In other cases the gap between desired and actual is more difficult to define. But whatever the issue may be, problems cannot be solved until they can be identified specifically.

Types of Problems

To begin, it is useful to recognize that all problems of human performance in an organization fall neatly into one of three categories. Therefore, it is helpful to start the problem-solving process by narrowing down the specific category into which the specific concern falls:

- **Attendance.** Attendance problems arise when an individual fails to meet the company's expectation that she will be at work on time every day.
- **Performance.** These issues involve problems with the quality and quantity of the individual's work.
- **Behavior.** The behavior or conduct category involves those issues that deal with violating the organization's rules or standards.

It is helpful to note that the three categories of performance problems are mutually exclusive; there is no overlap between the three.

Determining the Cause

Once we have clearly identified the specific gap between desired and actual performance, the next step is to determine why the employee isn't doing the job properly right now.

When a person isn't performing the way we expect, there are only two causes. The performance deficiency involves either a lack of knowledge or a lack of execution.

It's important to distinguish between knowledge and execution problems because the solutions will be very different. Training is the obvious solution to a knowledge problem, but training won't help when the cause of the problem is a lack of execution.

Removing Obstacles

Deficiencies in knowledge are cured by training. What do you do when the person knows how to perform properly but still isn't doing the job right? The need here is not for training; it is for job engineering.

The solution to a great many performance deficiencies lies in re-engineering the job. Arrange for people to get feedback so that they know exactly how well or poorly they are doing, remove any obstacles that thwart good

performance and rearrange the consequences so that performing well makes a difference.

Shifting the Responsibility from Manager to Employee

There are five things that clearly specify the exact gap between desired performance and the employee's actual performance:

1. Clarify expectations.
2. Provide training.
3. Arrange appropriate consequences.
4. Provide feedback.
5. Remove obstacles.

Once the manager has addressed these five aspects of honing in on the reason for the deficiency, he has done everything that he is responsible for. The burden for solving the problem now shifts to the employee. The individual with the problem now becomes the one who is fully responsible for its solution. ●

PART II: PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT

Preparing for a Performance Improvement Discussion

When performance problems initially arise, the effective manager starts by determining the most likely cause. This problem-identification process does not happen in a vacuum. Good managers are always talking with their people, doing the constant reviewing and discussing that causes problems to become visible early when they can be easily solved. He can determine the cause of a subordinate's failure to meet expectations by informally and casually talking with the individual whose performance is the source of concern.

A Performance Improvement Discussion is not a spur-of-the-moment event. It has specific goals and follows a definite structure. Holding a Performance Improvement Discussion with an employee allows the supervisor to communicate the urgency of change at the same level of seriousness as she would in one of the formal steps of disciplinary action, but without the sometimes burdensome administrative requirements of approvals and documentation and witnesses and other impediments.

Conducting the Performance Improvement Discussion

Performance Improvement Discussion involves three components: What the manager does before the meeting

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to prepare for the face-to-face session, what she does during the meeting, and what she does when the meeting is over and the employee returns to work.

Start by determining which of the three types of problems is the primary concern. While an individual may have a need for improvement in several areas, keeping unrelated issues separated increases the chances of getting each problem solved.

The manager can concentrate on the most significant issue and then, once agreement to solve the critical problem has been gained, can mention the need for a total commitment to acceptable performance as the meeting is wrapping up.

The Purpose of the Discussion

What is your goal during the meeting itself? What needs to happen while you and the subordinate are talking to tell you that you can now bring things to a close because you have accomplished your objective? The goal of the meeting is to get the subordinate to agree to change. That's it. Period.

The reason that the goal of the conversation is to get the employee to agree to change is this: If the person agrees to correct a problem and then later the same problem arises again, the manager will hold another conversation with the individual. But the subject of this second conversation will be different than that of the first. This time the subject will be the employee's failure to live up to the agreement.

Determining the Consequences

Every choice brings consequences. When an individual chooses to perform in a way that the organization finds unacceptable, and the individual chooses to continue that unacceptable behavior even after learning that it is unacceptable and the reasons why, the individual has the right to know what the consequences of that choice are.

Once the employee understands that decisions have consequences, she can make an informed decision to meet the standards of the organization, not because of threats or intimidation but because she understands fully the consequences of both meeting and failing to meet the standards of the organization. ●

Conducting the Performance Improvement Discussion

Whether the discussion with the employee is a non-disciplinary Performance Improvement Discussion or a formal step of the Discipline Without Punishment system, the goal is the same: to get the employee to agree to solve the problem and return to fully acceptable performance.

Before initiating the discussion, it is important to prepare fully, anticipate any difficulties that may arise and create the conditions that will assure the highest probability of success. In order to be fully prepared for the discussion, create a short, written summary of the essential information that will be needed in the meeting.

Opening the Discussion

Perhaps the most difficult 10 seconds in a manager's life occur at the moment when a subordinate shows up at his door for a scheduled Performance Improvement Discussion. The manager knows that if he is able to get the meeting off to a good start, the chances of overall success will be great. So, how do you get things off to a good start? By getting right to the point, the manager will put the employee at ease.

"Joe," the manager begins, "I've got a problem and I need your help." With those 10 words, the manager has accomplished four worthwhile ends:

1. By using the employee's name, he has begun the discussion on a personal basis.
2. He has gotten right to the point.
3. By using an "I" message, the manager has prevented defensiveness that comes with a "you" message.
4. He has enlisted the employee's help.

The use of the magic phrase, "I've got a problem and I need your help," will command the individual's attention. Then immediately move to a full description of the concern you just introduced. Explain the problem in terms of actual and desired behavior. In a straightforward, businesslike way, the manager simply makes three statements: "Here's what I want," "Here's what I get," "There is a difference."

Letting the Employee Speak

Having opened the discussion and stated clearly the specific desired and actual performance, the manager now turns the conversational ball over to the employee by saying, "Tell me about it."

Listening carefully certainly indicates that you really are interested in what the other person has to say. By listening, you send a message that the other person — his feelings and perceptions — are really important to you. By careful listening, we can confirm that there is no other information that could cause you to change your decision about the actions to take.

Closing the Discussion

If the conversation has been a Performance Improvement Discussion, simply thank the person for agreeing to correct the situation, and express your confidence that the

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two of you will never need to talk about the matter again. However, if the discussion is a formal disciplinary transaction, the manager must take two additional steps:

1. Advise the employee that it is a formal disciplinary transaction.
2. Advise the employee which step of the Discipline Without Punishment system is being taken.

When the manager has gained the employee's agreement, discussed and decided upon the action the individual will take to solve the problem, advised the employee whether or not the discussion is a formal disciplinary transaction, and expressed a personal belief that this will be the last time they will ever have to address the matter, the Discuss step has been completed. ●

PART III: DISCIPLINE WITHOUT PUNISHMENT

The Mechanics of Discipline Without Punishment

Let's look at the most important similarities and differences between Performance Improvement Discussions and formal disciplinary transactions. Both Performance Improvement Discussions and discipline steps are carefully planned, initiated by the immediate supervisor and have the same goal — getting the employee to agree to change.

But there are some significant differences. Disciplinary action usually requires the supervisor to get someone else's OK before proceeding, and a witness is often present. Also, there is no limit on the number of Performance Improvement Discussions a supervisor can conduct.

Procedures: Reminder 1

Before the meeting. The same information that you gathered for the Performance Improvement Discussion is needed before conducting a Reminder 1 or Reminder 2 transaction: category of problem, desired and actual performance, adverse effects, logistical consequences.

During the meeting. There is no reason to vary from the approach used to open the Performance Improvement Discussion of saying, "I've got a problem and I need your help in getting it solved," reviewing the desired and actual performance or the rule violation, and then asking the individual to respond.

After the meeting. The key difference in post-meeting activity between the Reminder 1 and the Performance Improvement Discussion involves documentation. A Reminder 1 must be documented. The simplest way to

document a disciplinary discussion is to create a discussion worksheet that is a post-meeting summary.

Procedures: Reminder 2

Before the meeting. Since the worksheet the supervisor filled out in preparation for the previous Reminder 1 will probably be available, most of the information should be readily on hand. Virtually every organization requires that before initiating a Reminder 2 disciplinary discussion, the supervisor get approval from one higher level of management in her own department as well as the concurrence of the human resources function. With necessary approvals obtained, the meeting may begin.

During the meeting. The manner and approach of the supervisor is no different from earlier transactions. She is serious, calm, dignified, businesslike and unruffled regardless of what the employee's behavior may be. When the employee proposes an action that might correct the situation, the manager will press the employee, firmly but respectfully, to make good on his intentions.

After the meeting. The greatest difference between the Reminder 1 and the Reminder 2 is the documentation of the two steps. The Reminder 1 is documented by the supervisor's completions of a discussion worksheet and placing it in the department file. To document the Reminder 2, the supervisor should also complete the discussion summary form, but the primary documentation of the transaction is a memo confirming the discussion and the employee's commitment to correct the problem.

Effective disciplinary documentation provides complete information about the problem itself, the history of the problem and, more important, the discussion that occurred between the employee and the manager about the problem. After the meeting is over, the manager will write the employee a memo summarizing everything that was said and the fact that the meeting was a Reminder 2. ●

Decision Making Leave

Of all the elements of Discipline Without Punishment, certainly the one that attracts the most attention is the final step of the system — the paid Decision Making Leave. Managers who can comfortably accept the idea of dealing with employees who create problems as responsible adults during the first steps of the process sometimes have difficulty extending that same philosophy to the last step.

When the Employee Returns

While cynics may scoff at giving people a "vacation day" and managers may be concerned about the appearance of rewarding bad behavior, almost universally the individuals

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who receive a Decision Making Leave treat it very seriously indeed.

With surprising consistency managers report that people that they did not expect to respond as adults actually take personal responsibility for their own behavior when the chips are down. In the frequent number of cases where this does occur, managers also report that the relationship between themselves and the individual is strengthened.

When problems arise after a Decision Making Leave, our human compassion may tempt us to give the employee a second chance. But is it a “second chance” we are actually providing? In the absence of gravely mitigating circumstances, it is time to say, “Enough is enough,” cut your losses and hire a replacement who will appreciate employment with your organization. ●

Discharge

A few people fail to make the changes required to maintain membership in the organization. In these cases, termination is appropriate.

Reaching the Termination Decision

The most difficult terminations arise with an individual who receives a Decision Making Leave because her performance is simply not up to par. After her return, she struggles to do the job right, but in spite of her sincere efforts her performance still is unacceptable, and no compatible job exists within the organization.

Whatever scenario produces the decision to terminate, the manager’s first responsibility is to the enterprise itself. Arrange the termination so that it occurs with the least damage to the company and fellow workers.

Creating a Discharge Plan

Good plans have three parts. The first part covers all the things you need to do before meeting with the individual to announce the termination. The second part involves the actual face-to-face meeting with the terminatee. This is your script — the exact words you will say to open the meeting and the checklist of points you will cover while the two of you are together. The final part of your plan covers exactly what will happen once the two of you shake hands and part company forever.

A good way to make sure that you are on solid ground in terminating an employee is to imagine yourself defending your action in front of a jury.

The Discharge

Bungled terminations usually result from the manager’s acting without thinking. Before you utter a word, write

down the most important things you plan to say, and then stick to your script.

Once you have written your script for the meeting, it is wise to prepare a written termination summary that spells out all of the information the person needs to know regarding benefits and final pay. Putting a written termination statement in the individual’s hand also demonstrates the organization’s belief that the interests of both parties are best served if there is a clear statement that summarizes all of the issues that surround the termination. Finally, the termination statement helps keep the meeting short.

When terminations are well justified and professionally executed, the rest of the work group realizes that the discipline system actually works. If the termination is handled with dignity and grace, the notion that this is a good place to work is strengthened. ●

Solving Attendance and Attitude Problems

Of all of the problems that supervisors in organizations have to deal with, the two that are most commonly reported are those of attitude and absenteeism.

Whatever the reason for the absence, the effect is always the same: The job doesn’t get done. Your customers don’t care why your staff is missing. They just know that they aren’t being served.

Building Personal Responsibility

How do we build individual responsibility in each employee so that he understands that coming to work is, in fact, a condition of employment? It starts by having supervisors shuck off excuses and focus instead on delivering the personal-responsibility message. In counseling an employee about the need to be at work on time every day, it’s important for the supervisor to start by stressing the organization’s attendance expectation.

Managers can increase the probability that the employee will change and correct the attendance problem if they discuss the need for change in terms of the choices the employee makes. We each have the capability for choice; the coaching process turns that capability into reality.

Dealing With Attitude Problems

Just what is an attitude anyway? When you think about it, all an attitude is is a judgment that we make about a person based on what that individual says and does. It’s the label we slap on another person’s behavior when we don’t like that behavior very much. But rather than using judgments and labels, the trick to solving attitude problems is

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to focus on what you know for sure — the specific things that the person did or said.

Instead of using the word “attitude,” instead narrow the problem down to specifics. What exactly is the person doing? Is he egotistical and credit-grabbing? Does she spend too much time socializing? Does he engage in pouting or sulking when he doesn’t get his way? All of these behaviors are different, but all of them are commonly slapped with the “attitude problem” label. ●

The Administration of the Discipline System

Besides the inherent flaws of the traditional, punitive progressive-discipline system, there is another problem that causes this procedure to be an ineffective problem-solving tool: the way in which the system is administered.

Supervisors often hesitate to initiate a disciplinary action simply because they don’t know the answers to the common questions that arise when the procedure begins, such as

1. Who should initiate the action in question? Almost without exception, the immediate supervisor is the person who bears the responsibility for initiating the elements of Discipline Without Punishment.
2. Whose approval must be gained before the action can be taken? No organization requires the immediate supervisor to gain approval before conducting a Positive Contact or Performance Improvement Discussion.
3. Where should the meeting be held? The critical requirement is that the location be somewhere private and on the premises.
4. Is a witness required to be present? No organization requires a management witness to be present for a Positive Contact or Performance Improvement Discussion. Many require a witness at the Reminder 2 stage, and most require a witness when an employee is placed on a Decision Making Leave.
5. How will the action be formally documented? Typical documentation involves a memo to the employee and sometimes a copy for their file.
6. Should the employee be required to sign the documentation? No employee signature is required until the final step, the Decision Making Leave.
7. Who gets copies of the documentation? Records are typically kept in the departmental file.
8. Does the employee’s slate get wiped clean after he maintains satisfactory performance? Most organizations agree that having a disciplinary

action deactivated after the problem is corrected is a good idea. ●

Creating a Discipline Without Punishment System

Individual managers can achieve a great deal of personal success by applying the techniques of dealing with people in a nonpunitive way. However, an organization-wide implementation of Discipline Without Punishment involves a major cultural change effort. Supervisors need to be trained in the new approach, and management must communicate to everyone concerned the purpose of the system and the reason for the change.

But Where’s the Pound of Flesh?

Old ways die hard. Both in convincing senior managers to adopt the Discipline Without Punishment system and in convincing managers to give up their old ways and deal with troublemakers with dignity and grace, a lot of emotional resistance must often be overcome.

Giving up a deep-seated, visceral need to settle the score is the price managers have to pay for implementing Discipline Without Punishment. They get improved performance and a deeper commitment to the organization and its expectations, but they don’t get revenge. You give up the ability to gain the emotional satisfaction of settling the score, and sometimes that is not enough. What we really want is that pound of flesh. It can take every ounce of maturity that we’ve got to turn loose of our need for revenge and be satisfied merely with solved problems and enhanced relationships.

The final test of the effectiveness and success of Discipline Without Punishment is when it stops being a program... a project... a policy. Discipline Without Punishment is finally and fully implemented when it has become so incorporated into the grain of organizational life that everyone considers it “just the way we do business here.” ●

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *Discipline Without Punishment*, you’ll also like:

1. ***Why Motivating People Doesn’t Work ... and What Does*** by Susan Fowler. Fowler’s Optimal Motivation process shows leaders how to help people meet their needs for autonomy, connection and competence.
2. ***Fearless Leadership*** by Loretta Malandro. This step-by-step guide will show you how to properly handle uncertainty and how to hold yourself and your employees accountable.
3. ***Thanks for the Feedback*** by Douglas Stone and Sheila Heen. Stone and Heen explain why getting feedback is so crucial yet so challenging, and they offer a powerful framework for enabling learning.