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How to issue a verbal warning

Here are some steps you can take to issue a verbal warning easily and appropriately:

1. Take the employee into a private room

Always discuss issues with employees in a private office/room or video call (if your company is remote). Let them know the general reason why you need to meet before you bring them into the room. Other employees shouldn't be involved in the matter. However, you may include another supervisor as a witness who can recount what was discussed in the meeting. You might also allow the employee to bring in a coworker or someone for support if they want.

2. State the issue clearly

Get straight to the point and let the employee know exactly what the issue is. Explain why their actions are a concern or problem for the organization. Give a specific example of the issue.

3. Discuss the changes they should make

Let the employee know they're valuable and you want them to change their behavior. Make sure you're specific about the changes that they need to make. A [performance improvement plan](#) (PIP) can define specific steps and expectations to avoid confusion.

4. Provide a timeframe for correction

Establish a timeframe for correcting the issue to avoid further disciplinary action. This can be one month, three months or six months depending on the issue that needs to be corrected and your organization's policies or objectives.

5. State consequences

Make the employee aware of the consequences if they fail to correct the current issue within the timeframe you give them. This gives them the opportunity to understand the seriousness of the matter and correct their behavior accordingly.

6. Provide support for change

Provide necessary support to help the employee make the required changes. If the employee isn't performing their job duties correctly, they might need additional

training/tools or a mentor to make it easier. An employee who is consistently late might benefit from a flexible work schedule.

Best practices for issuing a verbal warning

Issuing verbal warnings productively takes some practice. Here are some tips that can help you know what to do and what not to do.

What to do:

- **Keep your tone professional:** The employee will probably follow your lead. If you remain professional, then they likely will too.
- **Keep a record of verbal warnings:** Document the correspondence and store it in the employee's file for future reference. If the employee doesn't improve and you take additional action, you have the records to show a pattern of behavior.
- **Send a follow-up email:** Follow up with the employee a week or two after the verbal warning to check their progress.
- **Offer your help:** Let them know you're willing to help them and answer any questions they have.
- **Stay calm:** There's a chance the employee may become upset. In this situation, it's essential that you remain calm and assure them that you want them to succeed.

What not to do:

- **Bring up other issues:** Keep the situation fair to the employee by staying focused on the behavior for which you're issuing a verbal warning.
- **Belittle the employee:** When you give an employee a verbal warning at work, show your respect for them, and remind them of the value they bring to your organization.
- **Ignore problematic behavior:** Even if you really like the employee and would prefer not to issue a warning, it's important to address problematic behavior to keep it from happening again in the future.
- **Lack consistency:** Issue verbal warnings for the same behaviors from all employees. If you give a verbal warning to one employee for failing to meet deadlines but ignore another employee's missed deadlines, you're treating employees unfairly which can create a negative company culture.



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Verbal warning sample

The following verbal warning sample gives you an idea of how to handle a situation with an employee:

“On January 22nd, you were 15 minutes late to work. We adjusted your schedule to allow you to work 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. instead of 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. to accommodate you. You were also instructed to let us know when you would be late due to extenuating circumstances. As of March 17th, you have been late six more times, and you failed to call or text with valid reasons for your tardiness.

It’s crucial that you’re on time, especially on the days we have our morning meetings. When you’re not on time, other employees must handle opening procedures. You also miss key information regarding the day ahead, and supervisors must take extra time to repeat the information to you when you arrive.

You need to show up on time every day from this point onward. Future tardiness without good reason may result in further disciplinary action and possible termination of employment. I’m here to help, and I’ll be scheduling weekly meetings with you to discuss the actions you’re taking to be on time.”

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