

# MANAGEMENT Matters

By Sandy Seay, President, Seay Management

## How to Properly Dismiss an Employee

*“Conflict delayed is conflict multiplied.”*

– Dr. Jordan Peterson

In Virginia, there are lots of apple trees. Most of the apples are good but every now and then you come upon a bad apple that you have to throw away. Like apple trees, employers, face a similar challenge. It would be wonderful if all employees would follow the rules and perform at a high level of excellence at all times and we know that most employees meet this standard and do a good job. Sometimes, however, we come upon an employee that is a bad apple and when that occurs, we are faced with the question of dismissal. Sometimes the dismissal may be due to a lengthy record of poor performance or policy violation; other times, it may be due to an incident so serious that dismissal is the only proper course of action.

Dismissing an employee is unpleasant and some managers worry about dismissing employees too quickly. Usually, however, the opposite is true. Most employers we know are good hearted and want to give employees a second chance . . . and sometimes a third and a fourth chance. You can get into just as much trouble being too good to an employee as otherwise. As a result, we tend to keep the bad apples much longer than we should, in the hope that they will improve. Gazing upon the rubble of a backfired problem, many of us have said with a sigh, “I should have fired that person a long time ago.” Most of the time, bad apple employees do not improve; to the contrary, they get worse.

Way back in “the Day,” our high school physics teacher taught us the Second Rule of Thermodynamics which is that, left alone, things tend to get worse, not better. For example, if

you toss an ax out into the yard, it will not tend to get shiny and sharp, but will become rusty and dull. The same principle is true with regard to bad apple employees – they don’t tend to get better, they tend to get worse, and the situation will be worse at the end than it is now.

And, dismissals involve conflict and most managers would rather avoid this kind of confrontation. A dismissal can create “situational stress” which shows up in the form of restless sleep, anxiety, stomach pain and palpitations. On the other hand, you may have a profound sense of relief when it is all over and the bad apple employee is gone.

Therefore, if you have an employee who needs to be dismissed, it’s better to move ahead and dismiss the employee now, take the heat of the moment, and let the healing process begin. Otherwise, it will get worse and will be worse at the end than it is now. I think this is what Dr. Peterson meant when he wrote, “Conflict delayed is conflict multiplied.”

Now, this doesn’t mean that you go out and “win one for the Gipper” this afternoon at four o’clock, but it does mean that, if you have made the decision that an employee needs to be dismissed, it’s better to move ahead with the dismissal quickly. Otherwise, things will be worse at the end than they are now.

### Sandy’s Suggestions for Successful Separations

Here are some suggestions for dismissing an employee the right way, so that he or she stays gone, and does not come back to haunt you, in terms of back wages, penalties, potential re-instatement and bad publicity.

1. Have the dismissal meeting at the end of the day. In

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