Coaching Improvement Plan (CIP)

Preliminary Information, Guidance, and Tips for Manager:

A Coaching Improvement Plan (CIP), also known as a performance action plan, is a tool given to an employee with performance deficiencies providing them with the opportunity to succeed. It may be used to address failures to meet specific job goals or to ameliorate behavior-related concerns. Performance issues are sometimes indicative of other issues in the person's life that may be a contributing factor.

A CIP should be used when there is a commitment to help the employee improve, not as a way for a frustrated manager to start the termination process. Used as the latter, it's nothing more than a document trail that should already exist, and it signifies to all employees that no such help is available.

Outcomes may vary, including improvement in overall performance; the recognition of a skills or training gap; or possible employment actions such as a transfer, demotion or termination. Once the need for a CIP has been established (based on an interactive dialogue between the manager and the employee), a draft of the plan is developed and provided to HR to review. An improvement plan should include:

- Information on what acceptable performance levels are and how the employee's current performance is deficient. Specifics regarding the unacceptable performance should be given, including dates, data and detailed explanations. Attach the job description and any relevant employer policies to further clarify expectations.
- Specific and measurable objectives that are achievable, relevant and time-bound (otherwise known as SMART goals). CIPs usually last 30, 60 or 90 days, depending on how long it would reasonably take to improve the specific issue. Examples might be:
    - In May, June and July, Jane Smith's quality errors must not exceed 3 percent each month, and she must produce at least 150 units each month.
    - During this 90-day performance evaluation, John Smith must have perfect attendance, with the exception of approved medical or family absences. This means that he must clock in and be ready for work by the start of each scheduled shift, return from all scheduled breaks on time and remain at work for his entire shift.
- Guidance on what management will do or provide to assist the employee in achieving these goals, such as additional resources, training or coaching.
- Details on how often the manager and employee will meet to discuss progress. This is often done once a week but may vary depending on the circumstances.
- Clearly stated consequences for not meeting the objectives of the plan. Options may include demotion, transfer to a different position or termination.

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General Sequence of Events for Implementation of a CIP:

1. DETERMINE IF A CIP IS APPROPRIATE
    a. Employee performance issue examples that should be improved:
        i. Not completing all of the duties outlined in the job description
        ii. Failure to meet deadlines
        iii. Low productivity
        iv. Insufficient quality of work completed
    b. Employee behavior issues that should be improved
        i. Rudeness
        ii. Poor customer service
        iii. Attitude
        iv. Persistent tardiness
2. A Coaching Improvement Plan (CIP) starts by having a conversation with the employee
    a. Under no circumstances is a CIP implemented without an initial conversation.
    b. An employee should never go into a meeting where they are presented with and are expected to sign a Coaching Improvement Plan (CIP) form without prior understanding.
    c. Never make the CIP a surprise. Any low performance should have been discussed in a previous one-on-one meeting already.
    d. Sample of statements in the discussion meeting:
        i. "I/We need your performance to be at …."
        ii. "I/We want to work with you to improve."
        iii. "I/We don't think we're at a point where we both need a CIP in place."
        iv. "But I/we do want to share that a CIP could be the potential next step down the line if we don't improve together"
        v. "Right now, I/we do want to support you to figure out how to make things better. Would you be open to discussing that?"
3. Manager and Employee DEVELOP A DRAFT PLAN together (not just the manager telling the employee what to do)
    a. Meet with the employee to discuss the performance plan
        i. "Together we can get to the outcome we both want to achieve."
    b. Clearly define together what success tangibly looks like and when it should be achieved by
    c. Develop a plan for how to reach success with a specific time frame defined
4. REVIEW THE PLAN WITH HR
5. IMPLEMENT THE PLAN
    a. Set up weekly checkpoint discussions
6. MONITOR PLAN PROGRESSION
    a. During weekly checkpoints, discuss progress made to date based on the metrics previously agreed to
7. PLAN CONCLUSION
    a. During the last weekly checkpoint, declare Success or that it is time to part ways