



Human Resources Department

SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY

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Date: May 4, 2010

To: Geoff O'Quest, Administrative Analyst 

From: Tami Douglas-Schatz, Human Resources Director

Subject: Response to FY 2009-10 Grand Jury Report: Progressive Discipline of County Staff: Policy and Performance.

The San Luis Obispo County Human Resources Department thanks the Grand Jury members for their inquiry into the progressive discipline process. Progressive discipline is a cornerstone of proper performance management and is required by the civil service system which governs the County's methods of personnel management.

The Human Resources Department agrees with the Grand Jury in its findings, which are as follows:

- 1. San Luis Obispo County's policies governing Progressive Discipline are appropriate.**

Response: The Human Resources Department agrees with this finding.

- 2. In general, the County's Progressive Discipline system is functioning well.**

Response: The Human Resources Department agrees with this finding.

- 3. Because personnel matters are confidential, the public is generally unaware of disciplinary actions taken when an employee's work is unsatisfactory or other behavior violates established expectations.**

Response: The Human Resources Department agrees with this finding.

- 4. Employees who fail to meet appropriate standards are subject to disciplinary actions up to and including termination.**

Response: The Human Resources Department agrees with this finding.

- 5. During the 34-month period examined by the Grand Jury, 42 employees were disciplined. Of those 19 were terminated, resigned or retired while facing discipline.**

Response: The Human Resources Department agrees with this finding.

- 6. It appears that occasionally employees whose performance is unsatisfactory are not put on appropriate notice or disciplined. Whether that is the result of supervisor oversight or other reason could not be determined.**

Response: The Human Resources Department agrees with the finding that occasionally employees whose performance is unsatisfactory are not put on appropriate notice or disciplined. With regard to the statement that "whether that is the result of supervisor oversight or other reason could not be determined," the Human Resources Department offers the following elaboration:

Each and every employee's performance and related development and/or improvement plan represents a unique situation. The propriety of an employee plan cannot often be fully evaluated without delving into the details of an employee's actions, the supervisor's actions, performance expectations of the position, unit, department and sometimes the county overall. Sometimes the workplace environment and culture play a role in the evaluation as well, depending upon the type of position the employee holds. Consequently, it is understandable that the Grand Jury did not conduct a separate investigation into this question. However, in each and every situation, it is possible to determine why unsatisfactory performance goes unchecked in the event a thorough investigation into the matter is undertaken.

- 7. County managers and supervisors are given at least basic training relating to their employee discipline obligations and responsibilities. Whether they get enough training is questionable and subject to debate.**

Response: The Human Resources Department agrees with the finding that County managers and supervisors are given at least basic training relating to their employee discipline obligations and responsibilities. With regard to the statement that "whether they get enough training is questionable and subject to debate," the Human Resources Department offers the following clarification:

A single formal training class provided by the County regarding supervisory responsibilities is only adequate when the employing department provides significant supplemental training and mentoring. The County Board of Supervisors and the County Administrative Office support the Human Resources Department's efforts to increase the formal supervisory training program to include additional required classes for all County supervisory staff members.

The Human Resources Department responds to the Grand Jury's recommendations as follows:

- 1. The County should continue to require mandatory training in progressive discipline to all supervisors and managers.**

Response: The Human Resources Department agrees and has already implemented this recommendation. This mandated course remains in effect for the FY 2010-11. The Human Resources strategic training plan provides for this course to continue into ensuing fiscal years.

- 2. The amount of training should be increased and all supervisors and managers should, on a regular basis, receive a “refresher” training which reinforces the importance of the immediate supervisor for an effective Progressive Discipline program.**

Response: The Human Resources Department agrees with this recommendation and is in the process of implementation. In addition to the mandated Basic Supervisory Course, which incorporates the progressive discipline training, two additional supervisory courses will be added in the FY 2010-11. Specifically, Establishing Performance Standards and Evaluating Performance courses are in the development phase and will be ready for presentation in the next fiscal year. A third course, focusing on progressive discipline, is also under development and is expected to be offered in FY 2011-12. The Human Resources department will continue to develop courses until an entire Supervisory Academy, which focuses on the technical aspects of supervision, is offered. Routine offering of all courses is included in the strategic training plan, which will allow for periodic refreshment of skills. In addition, a departmental advisory committee to Human Resources is providing resources to assist in the development of a Leadership Academy, which will focus on the leadership components of management. These courses will enhance the skills of existing and new managers as well as contribute to the County's succession planning efforts. It is anticipated that the Leadership Academy components will be finalized in the next fiscal year as well.