Discussing performance at work, whether directly related to our specific jobs or more generally related to overall behaviour, is an area of discomfort and confusion. This MyInfo resource looks at one mechanism that is used to clarify expectations: a Letter of Expectations. We will cover what you can expect and how we can help you achieve the best result.

According to BCP5A HR policy and guidelines there are two distinctly different mechanisms: Letters of Expectations and Letters of Discipline. However in the last three years, we have reviewed Letters of Expectations sent to staff which are disciplinary in nature and have never once review a Letter of Discipline. Because our members are most often faced with dealing or responding to letters of expectations that cross the boundaries into performance management and at times discipline, our tips are given for that context.

Finding Out...

Why?

Your Options

How We Can Help

WHAT IS IT?

Because letters of expectations are used for a variety of purposes (not always intentionally!), their content varies somewhat. On the most basic level, the letter outlines desired objectives concerning work responsibilities or work behaviour. In some instances the letter is part of an ongoing process of discussion between the supervisor and staff about areas which require improvement. The letter may also serve as a serious prelude to potential disciplinary action. Frequently, a letter of expectations is placed in an employees’ personnel file that follows the employee from position to position.

Generally speaking, a letter of expectations is most effective if it arrives after one on one discussions about workplace issues or responsibilities have already taken place. Depending on the wording in the letter, they can be part of a disciplinary process or solely as an approach to performance management. There is a wavering grey line between those two realms and often the line is blurred. Rather than delve into the differences between the two, we will highlight some predictable givens.
RECEIVING A LETTER OF EXPECTATIONS

Everyone reacts negatively to receiving a letter of expectations. Not once have we received a phone call from a member to say how delighted they were to receive such a letter! If you are the unhappy recipient of this type of correspondence and are a BCEEA member, please call us. We will review the letter with you to ascertain the nature of the letter and help you formulate productive and positive next steps. Here are some of the things we’ll discuss with you:

- Is this letter a surprise or have you discussed some of these issues with your supervisor in the past?
- Is the letter an explanation of duties or do you believe that it is intended to manage performance?
- What are the specific instances or behaviours mentioned in the letter and what do you believe is true about the situation? Do you think the letter is accurate or not?
- What inferences are you drawing from receiving the letter and how accurate are they? What do you believe the intentions are of your supervisor in sending you this letter?
- Do you think the letter is fair?
- Once you answer those questions, we will then discuss what your goal is in the situation. Is it to correct erroneous information, is to present a case for why the letter should be removed from your personnel file, is it to seek clarification or present your viewpoint?
- Lastly, we will help you assess whether your response to receiving the letter will manage the situation down or escalate it and examine the implications of either of those options.

WRITING A LETTER OF EXPECTATIONS

1) The first basic question you need to answer is “Why am I writing this letter? You may wish to consult with your PSA HR advisor as to what the best mechanism is to achieve your purpose.

2) “What do I anticipate the result will be from sending the letter?” Considering the impact such a letter has, you need to make sure the outcome is worth the risk that the reaction will bring. Also, the letter ought to be part of a longer-term conversation that has taken place between you and the recipient. Only in very unusual circumstances would you write this type of letter without first having one-on-one discussions with the employee about your expectations and their performance or behaviour.

3) Have you put the letter in a context? (“Following our discussions, this is to clarify my expectations of you while you are in the temporary assignment, or failure to meet these standards may result in disciplinary process etc.”)

4) When you review your first draft of the letter are you being clear about the difference between the facts (the observable behaviour or measurable performance) and your conclusions or assumptions about those facts?

5) Realistically, what do you expect to be the outcome of sending this letter to the employee? Is that result what you want or is it helpful? If not, consider using a different approach.

HOW DOES THIS ALL HAPPEN?

In some situations, the letter is handed to the employee in a meeting. When the issues in the letter are known or anticipated to be contentious, I have seen supervisors hand the letter to the employee and then go through it item by item. Needless to say, this is almost entirely wasted time due to the highly charged reaction people have to receiving such a letter. The recipient sits there reeling and not taking much in while the supervisor, with the best of intentions, laboriously reviews the letter point by point to “ensure that the employee understands the contents.” A quick look at any research literature related to difficult conversations will clarify that this approach is not helpful and can be very damaging as the employee can easily overreact due to their emotional state.

As a supervisor, if you are contemplating a meeting to deliver the letter, you will want to be very realistic about what you can accomplish. The most we recommend in an initial meeting is to put the letter in a context (what is the purpose of the letter), outline next steps (I’d like to meet on Tuesday to discuss the letter with you) what they can do in the meantime (if any questions occur to you, please contact me. Then set a future meeting date and finish with “Is there anything you need to know from me right now?” If this situation relates to negative workplace behaviour or performance, during the follow up meeting, be prepared to give specific examples (evidence, observed behaviours) and explain how you came to your conclusions about the employee.
If you are the recipient of a letter of expectations and are called into a meeting, it is important to remember that any strong emotional reaction will diminish and that "speaking your mind" while you are feeling emotional might, in fact, not be your mind at all but simply a reaction to feeling under threat. If your supervisor insists on going through the letter in detail, it is perfectly acceptable to listen and then explain that you had some trouble taking it all in and that you require a day to read the letter and absorb its contents before meeting again.

Self-test: Are You Being Bullied? Consider each of the questions in the self-test below, then circle the appropriate number to indicate how often the described behaviour happens.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Does the person you’re having trouble with:</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Not Often</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Almost Always/Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Ignore you, not say hello when you greet them, not return phone calls or emails</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Dismiss what you’re saying or “put you down” while alone or in the presence of others?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Sabotage you or make you look foolish, such as “forgetting” to tell you about a meeting or, if the person is your boss, set you up to fail by placing impossible demands on you?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Spread rumours, lies and half-truths about you?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Frequently act impatient with you, treating you like you’re incompetent?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Blame and criticize you?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Try to intimidate you by interrupting, contradicting and glaring at you and giving you the silent treatment?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Tease, ridicule, insult or play tricks on you, especially in front of others?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Always insist on getting their own way and never apologize?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Yell, point their finger, swear, insult or threaten you or call you names?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TOTAL SCORE=

Add up the numbers to get your total score. There is a possible total score of 33. If your score is 5 or below, it doesn’t look like you’re being bullied. If your score is between 6 and 19, there are indications of bullying behaviour. Naturally the higher the score, the more pronounced the behaviour. If your score is 20 or above, you are definitely being bullied. As scores increase beyond 20, the severity of the bullying is escalating.

**HOW CAN THE BCEEA HELP?**

If you are a member, call us, we offer a confidential support. We will:

- Help you select the best way to manage your situation.
- Help you lay out the situation so that you can assess clearly what is occurring.
- Assist you to document your experiences.
- Support you in defining what your preferred and practical outcomes are in the situation.

Then we’ll work with you to develop a strategic action plan and provide coaching, feedback and support as you take the next steps. The bottom line is to remember you are not alone. We understand what you are going through because of our experience with other members in similar situations.
The BCEEA does not deal with the bullies themselves—our priority is to take immediate action to protect the well-being of our members. How do we help our members?

- We work with them so that they can see the situation clearly.
- We help them understand what reasonable behaviour in the workplace is, and what is clearly bullying.
- We help them identify a productive course of action to deal with the bullying.

We also help them figure out what is the most realistic outcome they can expect. This frequently involves the victim leaving their current work assignment at least temporarily, if not permanently. We coach members through the process of securing temporary assignments, lateral transfers or new jobs. If you choose to raise the issue using the BC PSA's workplace harassment process, we will continue to offer our support as you progress. We support you, the member, so you know you are not alone. To locate the supports offered by government, go to the MyHR website and Google bullying.

MORE HELP: The BCEEA offers learning events such as Maintaining Personal Resiliency or Difficult Communications so that our member can further enhance their ability to manage other effectively and with less personal stress.

**HOW CAN I PREVENT OR ADDRESS BULLYING IN MY WORKPLACE?**

Workplace bullying is often subtle or hidden. It is often associated with poor management styles and/or lack of presence of management in a division, branch or unit. Managers need to be aware of the impact that bullying has on staff, clients, and organizations. It is important to be aware of potential signs and symptoms associated with bullying in the workplace.

Signs and symptoms may include:

- Grievances by employees against their manager
- Declining work performance of dedicated and hard-working employees
- Increased stress and tensions between staff in a unit
- Poor morale or WES scores
- Reported fear of a co-worker by other workers
- Individual symptoms of depression
- Increased absenteeism in a department/unit

*(Hutchison et al. 2005; Rowell 2005)*

Managers may unwittingly encourage bullying by:

- Pitting workers against each other or emphasizing a competitive work style
- Having a lax management style (employees must determine what is acceptable and what is not)
- Making unreasonable demands and goals of employees and managers
- Failing to give supervisors the authority to reprimand problem workers
- Setting impossible deadlines or providing insufficient funding to accomplish a goal.

*(Workplace Bullying Institute 2007)*

Managers can complete a culture assessment like the one following to help identify the areas requiring further work in building your organization’s culture of dignity and respect.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People Focus</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Most of the Time</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you give people personal responsibility?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you actively seek out the views of others?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you committed to team development?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you instill confidence in others?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you encourage open feedback and debate?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Integrity</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Most of the Time</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you do what you say you'll do?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Do you show respect to everyone?
Can you say sorry when you've made a mistake?
Are you open and honest about your mistakes and do you learn from them?
Are you fair in all dealings with others?

**Visibility**
- Do you actively promote an open door approach?
- Do you champion a culture of respect and dignity?
- Are you available to listen to the views of others?
- Are you prepared to talk to staff and clients about the need for respect and dignity at work?
- Have you put building a culture of dignity and respect on your main agenda?

**Promoting Standards**
- Do you establish individual and team goals?
- Do you give personal recognition to others?
- Do you use feedback and coaching constructively?
- Do you schedule regular time for improving interpersonal relationships?
- Are you constantly looking for opportunities for improvement?

**Challenging the status quo**
- Do you openly challenge unacceptable behaviour?
- Do you unearth and address prejudiced attitudes?
- Do you critically examine policies and procedures to make sure they’re fair to everyone?
- How did you do? Add up the ticks in each column

Now multiply each column total by the appropriate weighting factor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Most of the Time</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total score (Maximum Score possible 125)**

**If you scored:**
- 0-50  You don't yet understand what is needed to create a culture of dignity and respect
- 51-75 You have some awareness of requirements but significant effort is still needed
- 76-100 You have reasonable skills in creating a culture of dignity and respect
- 101-125 You have excellent skills in creating a culture of dignity and respect

Now ask your team to complete the questionnaire anonymously and see how they rate you.
(Adapted from: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development Website, www.cipd.co.uk)

"If organizational leaders fail to enforce their anti-harassment policies, employees may conclude that the climate supports harassment, leading to more harassment and organizational backlash. Building inclusive environments and squelching harassment when it does occur will go a long way toward building an environment for healthy and productive employees. ...Anti-harassment or bullying policies are important, yet will not effectively reduce harassment unless accompanied by genuine efforts to change behaviour." (Raver & Nishi 2010)

**IF YOU SEE BULLYING OCCURRING?**

There are several steps you can take to assess and then prevent bullying in your workplace.

- Make sure you are familiar with and follow bullying or workplace harassment policies and procedures.
• Have an informal meeting or conversation with staff to explore their concerns.
• If you are the responsible supervisor or in a senior position, you need to make sure to have examples of the alleged bullying and to understand what outcome the complainant would like to see. In order to be fair, you need to decide whether the behaviour is bullying or harassment. The alleged bully may have no idea about the effect their behaviour is causing. Malicious allegations can also happen.

(Health & Safety Executive, UK)

Remember to avail yourself of the supports and resources available to you through your home organization, the BCPSA or if you are a member, through the BCEEA.

"It is important for leaders to clearly communicate to employees that they are taking the situation seriously and that all forms of mistreatment are unacceptable. Managing employees' perceptions of organizational tolerance for harassment is especially important in light of evidence on impairment of job attitudes after experiencing a single type of harassment. If organizational leaders fail to enforce their anti-harassment policies, employees may conclude that the climate supports harassment, leading to more harassment and organizational backlash. Although it may be impossible to eradicate all instances of workplace harassment, building inclusive environments and squelching harassment when it does occur will go a long way toward building an environment for healthy and productive employees." (Raver & Nishi 2010)

Resources on Workplace Bullying

Worksafe BC has an excellent list of resources from a wide variety of jurisdictions:

http://www2.worksafebc.com/Topics/Violence/Resources-WorkplaceBullying.asp

The following links list tools, publications, and other resources to help prevent violence in the workplace. These resources may not meet all the requirements for health and safety in British Columbia. Please check the Workers Compensation Act, the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation, and related materials for specific WorkSafeBC requirements.

Canadian Sources

Bullying in the Workplace: A handbook for the workplace

Although other types of violence receive more media attention, workplace bullying has increasingly been the focus of researchers, employers, unions and health and safety professionals. Healthcare and community care organizations need new tools to improve their violence prevention strategies including methods to address workplace bullying.

Source: Ontario Safety Association for Community and Healthcare

* PDF (732 KB)

Bullying in the Workplace

This website uses a question-and-answer format to provide information on preventing and dealing with bullying in the workplace.

Source: CCOHS (Canadian Centre for Occupational Health & Safety)

* HTML

Canadian Initiative on Workplace Violence

Website of the Canadian Initiative, a social research firm incorporated in 1999 to study trends in workplace conduct within Canada. Content includes research and practices related to reducing the risk of workplace aggression.

Source: Canadian Initiative on Workplace Violence

* HTML

Towards a Respectful Workplace

The research generated under this study has produced an online toolkit, an employee guide, and an organization's guide.

Source: University of New Brunswick, Fredericton

* HTML
Foreign Sources:

Bullying and Harassment

This website provides advice and guidance on dealing with bullying and harassment in the workplace.

Source: HSE (Health & Safety Executive, UK)

Preventing Workplace Bullying

These practical guides for employers and employees recommend that workplace bullying be treated like any other health and safety hazard, which should be identified and assessed for risk.

Source: SafeWork, South Australia

Additional Sources:

• Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, http://www.cipd.co.uk/

• Once, Twice or Three Times as Harmful? Ethnic Harassment, Gender Harassment, and Generalized Workplace Harassment. (Raver, J.L. and Nishii, L.N. Journal of Applied Psychology 2010, Vol 95, No 2, 236 - 254)

• Workplace Bullying: Aggressive Behavior and Its Effect on Job Satisfaction and Productivity. (Fisher-Blando, J.L., February 2008, University of Phoenix)

• Workplace Bullying Institute: http://www.workplacebullying.org/

Please remember that this MyInfo sheet has been developed to provide general tips and does not take into account any individual circumstances, constitute legal advice, represent government policy or replace a personal consultation.