

# Discipline

Leadership demands that bad behavior be sanctioned. Avoiding sanctions can demoralize the organization and give license for worse. But inflicting pain is not a pleasure for a good leader. How do you deal with this stern demand?

## Sandy Rowe

I can't imagine that for anyone, the toughest disciplinary steps don't include having to fire someone. Especially when you know you're firing someone with promise and potential, or someone who's had significant achievement, and for whom you know this is going to be a devastating personal blow that will affect them the rest of their lives.

The lessons are that the institution has to come first. However, we always want to do the best we can for the individual. If those things are in conflict, there's no question that your responsibility as leader is to assert the values of the institution and to do what's best for the institution.

## Jack Fuller

The hardest thing you have to do is to fire somebody. I've always found plagiarism cases the hardest, frankly, especially the ones that are small instances.

I've tended to give people a second chance, punish them in their pocketbook and their assignment often, but not make — unless it's egregious — the first of the infractions the last for the person.

And in some cases, it has worked. In other cases, we've gotten second infractions, and we've had to fire people anyway.

Anybody who is going to be a leader has to be prepared to inflict pain on occasion. You hope you're doing it wisely and thoughtfully and without anger. But if you're not prepared to do it at all, you probably ought to leave your role.

## Neal Shapiro

We live in a litigious age where I find that some things I have to do, I resent, (such as) the colossal amount of paperwork and documentation it takes to do things when I think I am so clearly right and someone (else) is so clearly wrong. And yet I have to

take all these steps to make sure, in the end, that things play out the right way. I think that is the way you have to do business today.



(On firing:) Give [new hires] a good hard look when they first get there. That is a smart thing to do. And it is better for them. It is better to tell someone at 24, 25, 26 — maybe I am wrong, but I do not think this is a good match for us. And let them go get another job. [It's better] than to have to tell someone at 46 the same thing.

### **Burl Osborne**

When firing someone, I used to worry about how terrible that person was going to feel when I told him or her that they were not working out, whether the individual was a beginning reporter who was in the wrong job or whether it was a fairly senior person who wasn't cutting it. That was wrong. In almost every case they knew it wasn't working. I never needed the box of Kleenex that I sometimes kept around. We worry too much about delivering negative feedback. The worst thing is to hold it in, store it up

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for an annual review and then just drop it on somebody. The time to give negative news is when the infraction occurs. Ditto and even more important for positive news when excellence happens, as it often does.

### **Arthur Sulzberger Jr.**

Treat each other with honesty, respect and civility. That's rule number one. ... We have asked people to leave our employ who were exceptional at making the numbers or making the stories, but did so on the backs of their people and created a work environment that was antithetical to the company I want to work for or I want to lead.

And we've asked them to leave. And we've done that knowing that our employees were looking at us to live up to the "rules of the road." In the end, these rules are only as good as your willingness to live by them.

### **William Hearst III**

General MacArthur listed his most important daily duties. Number one was to pray to God. And number two was to have the courage to root out the people in the organization who don't measure up.