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Discipline Policies Can Add Accountability and Trust

Establishing consistent discipline policies may help build trust throughout a railroad

After completing 58 Safety Culture Assessments, we have identified numerous opportunities for strengthening safety culture at short line and regional railroads. One opportunity for improving safety culture involves the implementation of a written discipline policy and ensuring it is consistently followed throughout an organization. Having a well-written, formal policy for rules conformance at your company and educating your employees about its content and application allows for employees to understand consequences for unfavorable actions and sets the level of expectation. Having a policy in place will help to identify gaps in rules conformance and allow the railroad to address these gaps before they lead to an undesirable event. It is key to maintain, update and consistently apply a written policy, and by doing this, the idea of favoritism or favorable treatment of one department or individual vs. another could be eliminated. A discipline policy can also open up the room for discussions surrounding various rules and other practices in which the workplace as a whole should avoid. When a workplace conforms to a policy, and it is upheld consistently, trust among employees can occur as each individual is responsible for his/her actions. A good discipline policy that is consistently utilized should contain a process that ensures like events trigger equal responses in its use.

Effective Discipline Policies Include:

- Consistency in language and treatment
- Fairness
- Written, not verbal
- Accessible in a place all employees in the workplace can see and understand
- Clear and simple
- Progressive actions for multiple offenses
- Opportunity for feedback and communication
- Opportunities for remediation or training to learn from mistakes
- Appropriate consequence for behaviors
- All departments uphold and abide by one policy including management
- All employees and managers held accountable for actions

For more safety tips, please see our website, www.shortlinesafety.org