

Coach or Discipline?

A quick-reference guide for leaders who want accountability without killing culture.

Sometimes the hardest thing for a Leader that's trying to keep their team accountable, but also wants to nurture an environment of growth is deciding the best way to handle problems that come up with their team. Is this a Coachable moment? Is this something that needs written documentation and possible progressive discipline?

This guide is not intended to go through the How To's, but to help you decide which route is appropriate based on the action that needs to be addressed.

Basic Guide

Questions for YOU -	Yes	No
Was there appropriate and clear expectations laid out beforehand regarding the specific behavior?	Continue to the Next Question	COACH
Was the behavior intentional?	Continue to the Next Question	COACH
Is this the first occurrence of this specific behavior?	COACH, with Documentation (most companies would label this as a Documented Verbal)	Continue to the Next Question
Was there real risk or harm involved? (Safety, Team Trust, Integrity, Guests)	PROGRESSIVE DISCIPLINE	COACH, with Documentation and clear expectations for the future
How did they respond when the behavior was addressed?	<u>Open/Accountable</u> COACH	<u>Dismissive/Defensive</u> DISCIPLINE

The goal here is to define the action and it's impact on the team –

Mistake + Ownership + Willingness to improve → Coach.

Intent, Impact, or Pattern that puts people or culture at risk → Discipline.

Coach when someone misses the mark but wants to get better.

Discipline when someone chooses behavior that damages trust, safety, or culture.

Coaching	Discipline
Skill or knowledge gap	Willful or repeated behavior
Expectations weren't clear	Expectations were clear
First-time mistake	Pattern or escalation
Goal: develop and strengthen	Goal: correct and protect
Builds confidence	Reinforces boundaries
Private, conversational	Direct, formal
Documents progress	Documents violation

Use Language That Matches the Moment

Coach

"This didn't meet the standard. I know you're capable of better, so let's talk through what happened and what needs to change."

Demonstrates belief. Reinforces standards.

Discipline

"This wasn't a misunderstanding. The standard was clear, and this crossed a line. We need to address it formally."

Clear. Calm. Confident.

Leadership Reality Check

- Coaching avoids discipline later.
- Avoiding discipline destroys culture faster than overusing it.
- Your consistency matters more than your tone.

Great leaders coach first—but they don't hesitate when standards are crossed.

Confidence comes from knowing **why** you're choosing coaching or discipline, not guessing in the moment.