

1. Have A Plan

Shooting from the hip when going into a grievance session is dangerously close to shooting yourself in the foot. Meet with your grievant beforehand. Review all the arguments. Decide on your best evidence. Talk about strategy — the plan for how the meeting is likely to go. Know what your desired outcome is.

If your grievant is going to testify, go through a rehearsal. Ask all the questions that you think management may ask when they try to undermine his/her testimony. Make sure the answers are what they should be.

2. No Surprises

Make sure you know everything about what happened in the case. Nothing destroys a game plan more than finding out new information in the middle of a grievance hearing, like witnesses you didn't know about, or prior warnings.

3. Don't Lose Your Cool

If you want to maintain control of the meeting, start by maintaining your self-control. That's not to say that anger or emotion cannot be effective tools for you to use. But don't be spontaneous. Any outbursts should be a part of your plan.

4. Be Realistic About Your Chances

Understand going into the session whether you're in a strong position or a weak one. What does your contract say? What about the law or enforceable policies? If the facts or precedent are clearly on your side, don't give an inch until you want to.

But most grievances aren't that black and white. Often it's a situation that is new, that wasn't anticipated the last time the contract was negotiated. Be sure you know if you're building a case on concrete or sand. And discuss the odds in advance with your grievant.

5. Know Where the Other Side Stands

Put yourself in the employer's shoes for a minute and think about how they'll present their arguments. Consider how they will defend their actions, and know before you walk into the room what your response will be to their presentation.

6. Don't Get Personal

You want to challenge management's actions, but you don't want to attack people personally. If you make it personal, it's harder for the other side to agree that you're right.



of Successful Grievance Presentation

And if management makes it personal, don't get baited into a shouting match. Don't let your grievant call the boss a stupid clown — no matter how true it may be. It will only help prove their claim of a pattern of inappropriate conduct on the part of the grievant.

7. Ask Questions

Look for the inconsistencies in management's arguments, and pick them apart. Don't let them off the hook if they offer evasive answers. Be persistent. If their side of the story is a fairy tale, chances are there will be a con-

tradiction in their arguments, witnesses, evidence, and/or statements. Find them.

8. Have Notes, Take Notes

Never go into a grievance hearing without a written outline of the arguments you're going to present, and the evidence you have to back it up.

During the hearing, take good notes — especially when management is making their case. Nothing slows a supervisor down more than knowing you are writing down what they say, word for word. Good notes will also help you prepare if you need to appeal the case further.

9. Have Written Evidence

It's a fact of life — people are more likely to believe something if it's written down. It worked for the Ten Commandments; it can work for you.

If you have copies of relevant official documents, hand them out at the hearing. If your argument entails a specific chronology of events, type it out and distribute it. Written documents easily become the point of reference for everybody's discussion. If they are your documents, then you are controlling the discussion.

10. Stay United

Never disagree among yourselves during a grievance hearing. Be especially careful if management asks a question you didn't anticipate. Feel free to call for a caucus, so you can step outside and discuss something in private with your grievant. Never show management that there is anything but full agreement on your side of the table.

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