Complaint Resolution for Union-free Workplaces
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A method to deal with complaints in the workplace is a necessity for most workplaces. In theory, having a process in place to prevent issues from "snowballing" out of control and to ensure harmonious employee relations is a sound organizational practice.

Individuals who have lingering and unresolved work-related complaints could have a profound and detrimental effect on the culture of an organization. When there is no procedure in place to field complaints properly and in a timely and effective manner, individual's concerns/complaints are left to fester until they finally erupt like a volcano. There is a direct correlation between disgruntled employee and lack of productivity, absenteeism, negative staff morale, which can ultimately have dire consequences on the well-being of an otherwise sound organization.

The process of submitting a grievance (also known as a complaint) in a unionized workplace is enshrined in a contractual document between the organization and the union. The contract is known as the collective agreement. The question is, if an organization is not represented by a union, then what is the process to submit a complaint. This is the central theme of this article.

An internal complaint resolution procedure is a good process for dealing with complaints for an organization whose staff is not represented by a union. It also makes sense from an employee relations perspective. By giving employees a procedure by which they can tender their concerns/complains, the organization may be able to prevent them from rushing off to court or proceeding to deal with their work-related complaint in an unproductive manner.

An internal complaint resolution policy has specific elements that need to be included and various matters that need to be considered. An internal complaint resolution policy needs to comprise of elements that outline the internal complaint resolution procedure. Examples of such would include the types of disputes covered by the policy, steps to follow when addressing complaint (usually four steps), and persons to go to with complaints, including alternates in special circumstances. These obviously only represent but a few elements contained within a complaint resolution procedure.

Specific considerations that need to be accounted for when designing an internal complaint resolution policy are that some organizations limit the subject matter of complaints. Then there are those organizations that leave it wide open to any work related complaint.

For most organizations with such procedures, their complaint resolution policies involve four basic steps. The first step typically involves informal discussion between the aggrieved employee and the person directly concerned, or the immediate supervisor. It is not unusual for some policies to require the submission of a written complaint and a

formal meeting right from the onset. The formality of the first step depends on the management style and organizational culture of the company/employer. If the matter is not resolved, the discussions move up the hierarchy to the next management level, and so on and so forth, eventually ending with either the Board of Directors, Chief Executive Officer, or with a neutral third party. As the complaint progresses through the steps, the complaint procedure becomes more formal.

An internal complaint resolution policy does not only serve the needs of employees but employers as well. Having policies in the workplace that provide methods of keeping a harmonious workforce can only be to an organizations advantage. The grievance procedure provides some diplomacy in dealing with sensitive matters within the workplace.   Developing an internal complaint resolution policy in your union-free workplace can provide a constructive avenue for employees to voice their complaints/concerns and truly feel that they have been heard.

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