

Guidelines: Letter of Expectation (LOE)

When expectations have not been met and you have coached the employee's performance and have not seen measurable changes, the next step is to put your expectations in writing. Putting concerns and your expectations in writing for an employee is an effective tool in addressing employee job performance and/or behavior concerns.

A Letter of Expectation (LOE) is a tool designed to help the employee succeed. The following are best practices and guidelines for writing Letters of Expectations. However, please keep in mind that Coaching and Feedback are critical to the employee's success. A supervisor must provide ongoing Coaching and Feedback to an employee regarding performance as it relates to the items addressed in the Letter of Expectation.

To ensure that a Letter of Expectation (LOE) is an effective tool in supporting employee success and that it adheres to recommendations from the Department of Justice regarding content language, the Human Resources Office recommends the following LOE Guidelines to WOU managers and supervisors:

Letter of Expectations (LOE):

- 1) An LOE is used to help the employee be successful in complying with Western Oregon University's policy and management expectations in the performance of their assigned duties.
- 2) An LOE is NOT a written disciplinary document and does not require the employee's signature of receipt. An LOE is a tool to be used to lay the foundation of what is expected of a WOU employee in the future.
- 3) While the purpose and reason (i.e. the issue or concern) should be identified, the focus of an LOE is to support positive change, not to charge the employee with substandard performance and/or behavior. An LOE should not be a written record of specific misbehavior or

- 4) Depending on the specific reason for the LOE, it is important to clarify:
 - a) What the employee must do to succeed (i.e. the Unit's Workplace Expectations and Performance Standards needing to be met).
 - b) If employee behavior needs to be monitored for improvement over time.
 - c) If an Employee Support Plan is being used in conjunction with the LOE. *(Note: an Employee Support Plan is used to address Performance Standards, and is not used to address Workplace Expectations. An Employee Support Plan establishes objectives to help the employee meet performance expectations/standards within an identified timeframe. If considering the use of an Employee Support Plan, please consult with the Human Resources Office.)*
 - d) If the severity of the issue is such that it requires the employee to correct job performance on an immediate and permanent basis, supervisors/managers should contact the Human Resources Office to discuss the situation before any action is taken.
- 5) Supervisors/managers must schedule follow-up discussions with the employee to again review the expectations set forth within the LOE and note the employee's progress in meeting or exceeding the expectations.
 - a) Documentation of the employee's progress should be attached to the LOE for the remainder of time that the LOE is in the supervisor's file. The employee may also provide a written response in addition to the progress update resulting from the follow-up discussion(s).
 - b) If an Employee Support Plan is utilized to document the employee's progress, it is to be kept in the supervisor's file with the LOE and should be reviewed during follow-up discussions.
- 6) It is important to note the LOE and supporting documentation (Employee Support Plan, notes, etc.) is to be maintained in the supervisor file, not in the employee's official personnel file.
- 7) Retention for a LOE and supporting documentation is generally 2 years. Supervisors/managers may remove a LOE and supporting

- a) An employee may request that the LOE and supporting documentation be removed from their supervisor's file. However, a decision to grant the employee's request will be made based on the individual facts related to each request with the earliest possible removal date being their next performance review date, or at least 6 months from the date the original concern is resolved. To follow-up on an employee request for early removal, supervisors/managers should always contact HR for guidance.
- 8) If an employee feels the foundation of the LOE is not accurate, he/she should work it through with their supervisor. It is important to remember that the LOE is an informal document, and a written opportunity for management to reaffirm Performance Expectations/Standards and Workplace Expectations. It is recommended that the LOE summarize concerns already verbally expressed to the employee and formalize those expectations and standards related to concerns previously discussed (**No Surprises**).

The Human Resources Office will work with supervisors and managers to support following these guidelines by:

- Using these guidelines in consultation with managers, supervisors and employees.
- Including these guidelines as recommendations in future management training materials and curriculum.
- Posting these guidelines on the HR Training web page.
- Posting a "suggested" LOE template materials on the HR Training web page.

Letter of Expectation – Narrative of “Suggested Style” Template

1st Paragraph – Purpose

The first paragraph should be a boilerplate that explains the purpose of the Letter of Expectation (LOE). It should state that the LOE is clarification and confirmation of discussions between management and the employee about behavioral or performance areas needing improvement. In and of itself, this LOE is not a formal corrective action; it should be noted that the LOE is not included in the official personnel file, but is kept only in the supervisor's working file.

2nd Paragraph – Concern

This paragraph should explain what behavior or performance standard is of concern and in relationship to management's expectation of the employee. It is important that examples and observable behaviors are used in this section to describe the areas of concern. Do not use general terms such as 'professional behavior' or 'bad attitude.' However, it is also important that specific dates and instances of the employee's specific performance are not cited. Emphasis should be on management's expectations and performance standards, not charging the employee with inappropriate behavior or substandard performance.

3rd Paragraph – History

This paragraph should include the dates of discussions with the employee about the area(s) of concern, and a summary of each conversation. It should also include information on the actions that have been taken to support the employee's improvement in work behaviors or job performance, such as coaching and counseling, or the development of an Employee Support Plan to support the employee being successful.

4th Paragraph – Expectations

This paragraph should list each of the specific expectations needed to address the area(s) of concern and describe short-term future actions to be taken such as training and monitoring of behavior or performance. A date should be included in this paragraph for a follow-up meeting with the employee to review the employee's progress.

Closing Paragraph(s)

In closing a LOE the supervisor should offer to meet with the employee and answer any questions he/she may have and reaffirm the supervisor's

commitment to helping the employee succeed. The closing paragraph(s) can reference the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) as a resource for the employee should personal issues be negatively impacting job performance. A date should be included in this paragraph for a follow-up meeting with the employee to review the employee's progress.

General tips

Putting concerns and/or expectations in writing for an employee is a very useful tool in addressing job performance and behavior concerns. For most employees getting something in writing feels very serious; some may need time to digest the information; others may become angry or react defensively. For this reason, it is important to draft the LOE in first person and in a positive and supportive manner. Always offer to meet with the employee and discuss the LOE and any supporting actions at the time the LOE is given.

(Note: If previous LOE's have been given to the employee within the last two years addressing the same or similar concerns, you should consult with the Human Resources Office to discuss if another LOE is an appropriate step.)