



When Leaders Should Involve HR: A Practical Guide for Field Leaders

Why HR Exists

HR is not just here for discipline, paperwork, or terminations.

Our role is to help leaders:

- Navigate employee issues
- Reduce risk
- Protect culture
- Coach through difficult situations
- Ensure consistency and fairness
- Support hiring and staffing
- Help leaders lead effectively

The earlier HR is involved, the more effectively we can support both the leader and the business.

A Simple Rule: If It Impacts People, Fairness, Safety, or Risk — Involve HR

Leaders are not expected to have every answer. When in doubt, reach out early.

Involving HR early is not a sign of weakness or failure. Early partnership helps resolve issues faster, more consistently, and with less risk.

GREEN / YELLOW / RED Model

GREEN = Manager Handles: These are routine leadership responsibilities.

Examples:

- Attendance conversations
- Minor coaching
- Dress code reminders
- Scheduling concerns
- Basic performance feedback
- Routine accountability conversations
- Day-to-day team management

Managers should still partner with HR if they are unsure how to approach the conversation.

YELLOW = Inform HR: These situations may be escalating and should not be handled alone.

Examples:

- Repeated behavior or performance issues
- Employee complaints
- Write-ups or formal documentation
- Escalating conflict between employees
- Employee becomes emotional or upset
- Employee mentions stress, anxiety, or medical concerns
- Threats of resignation
- Concerns about favoritism or retaliation
- Situations involving multiple employees
- Ongoing attendance concerns
- Suspected policy violations

HR should be informed early so we can help guide the situation before it escalates further.

People. Performance. Partnership.





RED = Contact HR Immediately: These situations carry significant employee, legal, operational, or cultural risk.

Examples:

- Harassment concerns
- Discrimination concerns
- Threats or violence
- Theft or dishonesty
- Safety incidents
- Drug or alcohol concerns at work
- Social media incidents involving the company
- Threats of legal action
- Retaliation concerns
- Ethics concerns
- Major policy violations
- Any situation involving protected classes
- Any termination involving uncertainty or elevated risk

Do not attempt to investigate or resolve these situations independently. Contact HR immediately.

Common Situations Where Leaders Should Involve HR

Contact HR Before:

- Terminating an employee
- Issuing a final warning
- Making exceptions to policy
- Handling a sensitive employee complaint
- Addressing potential harassment concerns
- Responding to threats or hostile behavior
- Managing accommodation or leave concerns
- Taking action when emotions are high
- Handling a situation that “doesn’t feel right”

What Can HR Help With?

HR can support leaders with:

- Coaching conversations
- Documentation review
- Investigations
- Conflict resolution
- Employee communication
- Policy interpretation
- Leadership coaching
- Performance management
- Hiring guidance
- Organizational concerns
- Risk assessment

What Should Leaders *NOT* Do Alone?

Leaders should not independently:

- Investigate harassment claims
- Promise confidentiality
- Ignore complaints
- Threaten employees





- Make emotional discipline decisions
- Retaliate against employees for complaints
- Delay reporting serious concerns
- Handle high-risk terminations without HR involvement

Remember: “Call HR Early”

Most HR issues become harder when:

- documentation is inconsistent,
- emotions escalate,
- communication breaks down, or
- leaders wait too long to involve support.

Early partnership helps protect the team member, the leader, the team and the company.

