

## Customer Service Performance Standard: When is it Performance and When is it Conduct, Continued...

Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) to address the standard contained within the critical element.

Writing a performance standard in this manner inappropriately combines performance and conduct. Doing this will likely cause the supervisor problems down the road if the employee, as in the scenario above, treats someone in a non-professional or discourteous manner, because the supervisor has to decide whether it is performance (can't do) or conduct (won't do). Furthermore, how is the supervisor going to put an employee on a PIP to give him/her an opportunity to improve in the area of professionalism and courtesy? Don't we expect our employees to behave appropriately 100% of the time? The other problem with the way the standard is written is that since it is included in the performance plan, a Union may argue that since the supervisor included it in the performance plan, it is clearly performance and not conduct (an arbitrator might agree as well).

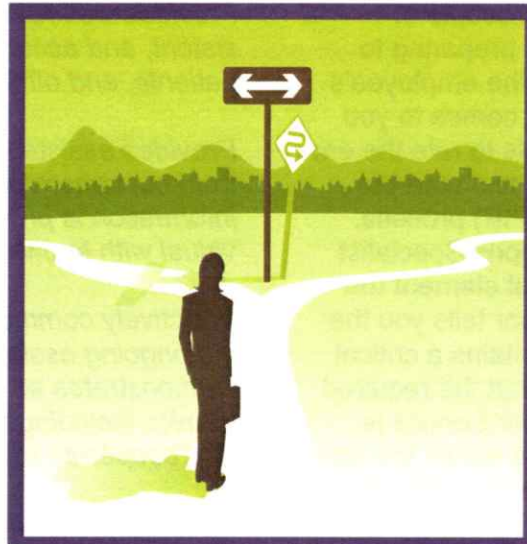
When writing performance standards, the supervisor should keep in mind that every employee has a customer, whether it is a customer in the true sense of the word, i.e. our Veteran patients, or other areas in the organization in which the employee interacts with and provides assistance. For example, it is not very likely that we in Human Resources have Veteran patients as our customers. However, we do interact with other customers in providing a support service to other departments as well as employees and applicants for employment. A performance standard that addresses customer service for a Human Resources employee might look something like this:

*Communication (Critical Element)  
Provides advice and assistance to internal and*

*external customers in a timely manner, usually within 24 hours of the initial inquiry unless there are extenuating circumstances.*

*Advice provided to customers is technically accurate. Customers are kept informed through status updates when research is required to provide guidance.*

*Assists co-workers within a workgroup on special assignments. Communicates with co-workers and assists with organizing, planning, and completing assignments.*



This particular critical element of Communication contains three performance standards that clearly address customer service. None of the standards mention anything about the employee behaving in a courteous manner as that is expected of all employees and is clearly conduct-related when they behave inappropriately.

As previously mentioned, policy only requires that a performance plan contain a standard that addresses customer service. Supervisors can certainly have a Customer Service element (either critical or noncritical), but it is not required. As long as the plan contains a standard that addresses how the employee will provide customer service through one or more of his/her duties, that will satisfy the intent of the policy.

Intermingling conduct and performance in a customer service performance standard could lead to a situation in which a supervisor has to "pick" the road he/she wants to travel. Wording the performance standard in such a way in which conduct (i.e. behavior) is not included, makes that road much easier to travel.