

What Is Chain of Command?

Worksheet

Chain of command is the line of authority and responsibility running from the chief executive down through middle management to employees. It establishes who supervises whom, clarifies accountability, and streamlines decision-making.

Questions

1. A project team needs approval for a small budget. Where should they start?
 - A) The CEO
 - B) Their direct manager
 - C) The finance director
 - D) Skip hierarchy-email the CEO
2. What's the primary benefit of chain of command?
 - A) Keeping employees quiet
 - B) Creating clear accountability and responsibility
 - C) Preventing all change
 - D) Making CEO wealthier
3. In an emergency, can you skip chain of command?
 - A) Never-always follow the line
 - B) Always-emergency trumps hierarchy
 - C) Yes, but report to your manager afterward
 - D) No-wait for approval through all levels
4. A flat organizational structure has
 - A) Many levels of hierarchy
 - B) Fewer levels, shorter chain of command
 - C) No decision-making
 - D) Confused authority
5. In a hospital, a nurse has a patient safety concern. What's the chain of command?
6. A software developer wants a budget increase for new tools. Who do they ask?
7. A retail store cashier reports a till shortage. What's the protocol?
8. Define: What is chain of command?
9. Define: Why is chain of command important?
10. Define: Example: retail chain of command?

Answer Key

1. B) Their direct manager - Always start with your direct manager in the chain of command. They know your work and can approve or escalate appropriately.
2. B) Creating clear accountability and responsibility - Chain of command clarifies who decides what, preventing confusion and ensuring accountability at every level.
3. C) Yes, but report to your manager afterward - In genuine emergencies (safety, immediate threat), action comes first, then reporting. But routine decisions should follow the chain.
4. B) Fewer levels, shorter chain of command - Flat structures have fewer management layers, so the chain is shorter and decisions move faster.
5. 1. Nurse reports to Head Nurse / Supervisor (immediate). 2. Head Nurse escalates to Department Manager (if unresolved). 3. Manager escalates to Director of Nursing (if critical). 4. Clear path ensures accountability and safety.
6. 1. Developer asks their Team Lead (direct supervisor). 2. Lead considers and may escalate to Engineering Manager. 3. Manager evaluates and decides, or escalates to VP of Engineering. 4. Budget approval flows through the chain.
7. 1. Cashier tells the Shift Supervisor (first in chain). 2. Supervisor documents and reports to Store Manager. 3. Manager investigates and may report to District Manager. 4. Clear accountability prevents loss and builds trust.
8. The hierarchical line of authority showing who reports to whom and who is responsible for decisions.
9. It clarifies responsibility, speeds decision-making, improves communication, and prevents confusion about authority.
10. CEO Regional Director Store Manager Department Lead Shift Supervisor Cashier/Associate.

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