

IF TERMINATION IS NECESSARY, DO IT WITH DIGNITY



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As a manager, one of the most difficult tasks you will have to do is to terminate an employee.

While there is a difference between those who are let go for performance issues and those who are affected by reorganization or downsizing, many issues remain the same. The termination itself needs to be well planned, designed and executed so as to protect the best interests of both the employee and the organization.

A significant number of individuals who have lost their jobs report that while they understood the necessity of the decision, they did not understand why the process of termination itself was handled poorly. Horror stories abound which, if properly planned, could have been avoided.

Inept terminations can range from overly apologetic (which confuses the affected employee) to its opposite: hard, cold and lacking compassion (which angers). Both of these extremes, and a myriad of inappropriate behaviors in-between, emerge from the discomfort that managers have in dealing with this type of situation.

The discomfort can be lessened for both the manager and the affected employee if the process is approached as a necessary business process and is executed with respect and compassion. Here are some ways to minimize the discomfort and awkwardness of a termination meeting, while preserving the dignity of the employee in the process.

- 1) Plan all the logistics ahead of time including where and when the meeting will occur, how the employee will exit after the meeting, and how the remaining employees will be notified of the change.
- 2) Have the meeting in a quiet, private place with NO interruptions. Plan for about twenty minutes. It is important to prepare an outline of the points you want to cover. It is common for the employee to not remember much of anything which is said to him or her at this meeting due to a range of emotions which occur.
- 3) Do not start the conversation with small talk, as it will add to the discomfort for both you and the employee. Start the meeting with something like, "Joyce, please sit down. Our agenda this morning is one that is not a pleasant task for me, but it is one that needs to be addressed..."
- 4) If the termination is for performance reasons, then review how the employee failed to meet mutually agreed upon expectations. If the reason is not related to performance, be sure to acknowledge the positive contributions that the person has made to the organization. Additionally, a letter should be given to the employee explaining the reason, and all pertinent salary and benefit information.
- 5) Be professional but never detached or distant. Regardless of whether the employee contributed to their circumstances or not, it is up to you to maintain the agenda at hand, all while being considerate and respectful to the person.
- 6) Speak slowly. Managers who have to deliver this bad news may speak too quickly in order to get it over with, which makes the message more difficult for the affected individual to hear and understand.
- 7) After you deliver the message, listen to their reaction and questions. They may be shocked, confused, embarrassed or angry that this is happening to them. Be sympathetic to their reaction, while affirming the non-reversible nature of the decision.
- 8) Be neither defensive nor patronizing. Avoid such comments as, "You should have seen this coming." Or, "This is probably for the best..." etc.
- 9) Immediately following the meeting let the person know that it is best if they leave the premises right away. Let them know that their co-workers will be informed about what has happened, and that their personal items will remain untouched until an after-hours time is scheduled for them to privately pack their belongings.
- 10) Have someone in management or human resources call them in the next day or so to see if they have any needs or questions that can be addressed. This will give the message that they are cared about, while assisting in tying up loose ends.

Losing one's job is hard enough. While the decision itself may not be able to be changed, the process can be. It is management's responsibility to make every effort to preserve the dignity of the individual, while accomplishing this necessary business task.