

Best Practices for Terminating Employees

A few years ago, we worked with a client who decided to part ways with a long-standing and trusted executive. The CEO and HR executive met with him to deliver the news, but instead of telling him to leave immediately, they gave him full control over how he spent his final day.

The executive chose to chat with colleagues, meet with his team to thank them for their efforts, and wrap-up his workday. To this day, he remains one of the company's best brand ambassadors. While this process was right for this person and this company, it may not be an option in other situations.

For many the loss of a job can be a traumatic experience. More than a source of income, a job typically provides people with a sense of identity, self-esteem and social networks. The good news is that much of this trauma can be avoided or mitigated by customizing the termination process to align your organization's values to the situation and each employee's needs.

Our experiences with the best employers demonstrate the value of thoughtfully planned and skilfully executed job loss notifications. Not only do employees leave your organization on the most positive terms possible, but you also protect your reputation as a desirable employer, and minimize the impact on the rest of your employees.

TERMINATION PLANNING

Once you've made the decision to part ways, set out a detailed plan for when, where, and how you will give the notice. The more prepared you are, the more effective the process will be. Tried and true best practices include avoiding a Friday announcement, ensuring that privacy is always a priority, finalizing all supporting documents and preparing and rehearsing a script with key messages.

We are seeing a growing trend where top employers go beyond the basics and focus on balancing the needs of the organization with the needs of individuals. They take the time to customize the process based on:

- The company culture
- The situation
- The person

Customizing the announcement demonstrates that the organization is pro-actively thinking about how the message delivery process will impact the individual's reaction and adapting their course of action. A simple way of implementing customization in your organization is to give individuals options about certain things, such as: How and when they would like to collect their things, and saying goodbye, or not, to colleagues.

DELIVERING NOTICE

When delivering the news, be respectful and caring. If you are nervous, it is okay to let it show. The employee will likely appreciate that the decision was not an easy one for you to make. Stick to your script, don't apologize, and keep your language neutral.

Be firm that your decision is final, but show compassion and offer kind words wherever appropriate about the employee's contributions or performance; reinforcing their self-esteem will help them move forward faster. Do not offer judgements such as "A year from now, you'll know that this was the best thing for you".

We recommend, wherever possible, that employees have control over when and how they leave that day. They will retain their dignity and be more motivated to speak positively about your company, thus protecting your employer brand. Of course, there will be situations where the affected individual has lost your trust, due to behaviours that led to the decision to end the employment relationship.

Ideally, you should have a career transition consultant on-site to meet with departing employees following the announcement. They provide impartial, confidential support you may be ill equipped to offer, given the circumstances.

MANAGING MORALE AFTERWARDS

You should communicate the departure of an individual to the rest of your employees quickly to avoid the spread of damaging rumours. Make this an opportunity to reinforce your organization's values by addressing and allaying staff concerns or questions in a way that is respectful to the person leaving. In short, accessibility, honesty and empathy will go a long way to maintaining employee engagement and productivity.

There is no right way to terminate the employment of an individual or a group of employees. It depends on the number of employees affected, the roles of those individuals, and the people themselves. Your career transition provider will help you determine the process best suited to your organization and the specific situation.

Whatever practices you follow, be deliberate in your planning, mindful of your organization's core values, and respectful of the impact of your actions on both departing and remaining employees. Your reputation in the labour market and the productivity of your staff depend on it.

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