

“I Am Sorry, But We Have To Let You Go”



Factors to consider before you tell an employee he is out of a job...

No matter how nicely you put it, being fired stings. The decision to let an employee go may occur for myriad reasons. Once the decision is finalized, your management of what comes next says a lot about you and your organization.

Due to the unpleasantness of the discussion, whoever delivers the bad news may become cold and detached. This adds to the stress of the situation and may lead to a more negative reaction and outcome from the newly terminated employee. If you do not manage the situation well, you may end up with an angry former employee who can cost you financially if they choose to sue you or if they say things that harm your reputation in the community.

How Can You Get Prepared?

Be Prepared Personally: Your ability to display empathy can have a real impact on the process and the outcome. Before you walk into the room prepare yourself to be present in the moment. Think about the other person. Be aware of your surroundings, how you are feeling, your breathing, even the chair beneath you. When you say those words, look the person in the eye and consider saying ‘I am sorry to have to say this to you’. Do not put a piece of paper in front of the person and ask them to read it, the paper can come second. Showing empathy can actually be healthy for you as opposed to locking down your feelings which can increase your own stress.

Be Prepared Professionally: Set aside an appropriate amount of time and have resources and information available. As part of the process, you need to explain what happens next and provide written information and steps. Ideally you should provide information about the outplacement program or community resources available to support the person emotionally and with their re-employment efforts.

What About Outplacement Services?

It can be a wise decision to provide an outplacement package. You may believe that the cost is prohibitive but you might be surprised. Prices will vary depending on the duration and level of service. Costs for executive packages can range as low as \$3,000 and up to 10% of the employees annual salary. Packages for professional employees often range between \$1,000 and \$3,000 and \$800-\$1,500 for other employees.

If it is usually worth providing a good package because the more service you offer your employee, the more support he will receive. This support may result in quicker re-employment for your former employee.

If cost is a barrier, look into contracting directly with individual career coaches. Cut out the outplacement agency. By contracting career coaches, you may have a lot more flexibility in negotiating rates and services. Costs may be as low as a few hundred dollars of basic services and support. In some cases, you could actually ask a coach to be onsite and/or be ready to call the employee within a few hours. This can be good for the employee and also good for your reputation with your other employees.

Letting an employee go can be an unpleasant task but if you approach the process prepared and with consideration you can reduce your risk and even help your employee move on more quickly.