

Being a Compassionate “Messenger”

Having to tell an employee that their position has been selected for layoff can be a difficult task. There may be no easy way to deliver the bad news, but below are some tips for how to do it in a direct and compassionate way.

- # **Preparation:** This is the first key to a successful discussion. Take time to plan and consider;
- the appropriate time and place to deliver the news,
 - the different range of emotions the employee may express,
 - your own emotional reaction
 - an outline of key points and written information

- # **Next Steps:** Be clear on the steps that follow the layoff, ie. effective date, insurance status, resource information, bumping rights, etc. Provide it in writing.

- # **Your Reaction:** Monitor your own reaction to the employee. Don't react defensively, even if you are challenged about your role in the decision. Look at how you are feeling personally, including your stress level, and get support for yourself.

- # **Anticipate Employee's Reaction:** Recognize that each employee may respond to stress and anxiety differently. There are several emotional phases people often go through when dealing with bad news. Be prepared to give the employee time to absorb the shock first.

- # **Safety Plan:** If you are concerned an employee may react in a hostile or threatening way, make sure you have a safety plan in place.

- # **Stay Visible:** Resist the temptation to lock yourself in your office. Wanting to avoid the unpleasant situation and feelings is a normal reaction, however, being available and visible to the dismissed employee and the rest of the staff is important.

Do's and Don'ts for Communicating Layoff

- Tell employees privately and individually
- Be sensitive to their response to the information
- Allow employee to vent and talk about the event
- Listen carefully - do not dominate the discussion
- Explain why layoffs are necessary for the *position* - not the *person*
- Be prepared to set up a later meeting to talk about options if the employee is too overwhelmed to take it in.
- Have an outline to cover needed items
- Put together a written package including information on benefits, support tools, job search services, training, and counseling
- Do not drag out the meeting
- Do not debate over the necessity of a layoff or why the position was chosen

- # **Demonstrate Compassion:** Employees who say their supervisor was compassionate and concerned had a more positive experience. Though it's not wise or helpful to commiserate with the employee, you can still show concern for their situation and offer support throughout the layoff process.

References:

Be Human When Giving the Bad News, Pat Ferrier, www.coloradoan.com

Communicating Layoff Information in a Compassionate Way, Minnesota State Employee Assistance Program, <http://www.doer.state.mn.us/eap/5.htm>

Leadership Considerations During Budget Cuts, Minnesota State Employee Assistance Program, <http://www.doer.state.mn.us/eap/5.htm>