

Letting People Go

Terminating Employment with Professionalism and Compassion

Letting people go can impact you and your team practically and emotionally. Letting someone go is one of the hardest things that you'll ever have to do as a manager. Handle the situation well and you'll minimize the uncertainty and disruption that it may cause for your team and your business.

But manage it poorly, and the person you're letting go might feel shocked, confused and angry. Their self-esteem may be damaged. And they may even want to "get back" at you or your organization. Your professional reputation could be affected, and you may even lose the respect and loyalty of your team.

No matter why someone is being let go, who made the decision, or how you feel about it personally, terminating their employment will likely fall to you as their manager. This is not a task that you can delegate! The person needs to hear the news from you directly and be given the chance to ask questions and air their thoughts and feelings.

If your organizational culture is one of transparency, then layoffs or firings may not come as a big surprise. But this won't necessarily make it any easier, and you may feel emotionally bruised by the whole situation. However, it's still your responsibility to make sure that the news is communicated properly, so aim to be as open, honest and tactful as you can.

You'll also need a strong plan of action. So, look at the things you need to consider before, during and after a termination meeting.

Once the decision has been made to let someone go, schedule the termination meeting as soon as possible. Choose the location and time carefully: pick somewhere free of interruptions, in a place where the person can arrive and leave without feeling uncomfortable.

If you must deliver the news via video call or telephone, advise the person to find somewhere quiet and private beforehand – and be sure to do the same yourself.

How to Tell an Employee You're Letting Them Go

This is never going to be an easy conversation. But these five steps can help you to make the termination meeting run as smoothly as possible:

1. Bring Someone with You

Arrange for at least one other person to attend the meeting with you. Ideally, this should be someone from HR who can make sure that you follow the correct procedure.

At the very least, you should invite a trusted third party to take notes and witness the conversation. This will also mean that you can give your full attention to the person you're letting go. If you think it's necessary, everyone present can sign the notes to show that they're an accurate record of the meeting.

2. Mind Your Body Language

Your **body language** will set the tone for the meeting, so be sure to give off the right signals. Demonstrate that you take the matter seriously by sitting up straight and maintaining good eye contact. Use your posture and gestures to show that you have empathy, but also that you're confident in what you have to say.

3. Be Direct and Clear

Don't get sidetracked by small talk. Instead, politely state the purpose of the meeting at the start, outline the decision that's been made, and explain what it means.

Be specific – and honest – about why the employee is being let go, and on what terms. Clearly outline the reasons why they're being let go, whether it's due to redundancies, layoffs, or that they are being fired.

Don't be afraid to **be authentic** . If you're sad or regretful about them being let go, tell them! And highlight that you appreciate all the work that they've done in the past and wish them well in the future.

4. Listen Carefully

Give the employee time and space to express themselves, and **listen empathically** to what they have to say. This means being aware of the emotions they're conveying as well as the words they're saying. You can show acceptance, though not necessarily agreement, by nodding or interjecting with phrases such as "I understand," or "I see."

It's natural for people to become **angry** or **upset** , so be prepared for this. If things become heated or the employee is struggling to regain their composure, you may want to suggest that they take a moment.

While it's important to show concern for the employee's feelings, avoid getting dragged into a debate over the rights and wrongs of the decision. If necessary, repeat the key details of what's been decided, why it has to happen, and what it means for them. You can be kind and firm at the same time.

5. Explain the Next Steps

Review the benefits and severance package that the person is entitled to receive. Where possible, give them any money that they're owed there and then – their final

paycheck, for example, or a holiday payout. If you can't provide this straight away, explain when and how it will be paid.

Also explain the practical steps that will come next, such as clearing out their desk, returning company property, working their notice period, or handing over responsibilities.

Finish by discussing any additional support that you can provide. Perhaps you can give them a reference, connect them to other potential employers, or point them toward new opportunities that might be opening up within the organization.

How to Let Someone Go in a Virtual Meeting

Letting someone go should ideally be done face-to-face, but there may be times when this is not possible. If you do have to break this type of news remotely, many of the above tips will still apply. Other things to consider are:

- **Choose the right medium.** A video call is best and, failing that, a telephone call. Remember to factor in any time zone differences. Email should only be used as a last resort.
- **Check your setup.** Test your equipment and Wi-Fi connection before the call – the last thing you want is technical trouble while delivering bad news. For a video call, make sure that your camera is positioned so the other person can see you clearly. And test your mic at the start of the meeting to check that they can hear you properly. If necessary, repeat what you need to say and give the person extra time to respond once you've delivered the news.
- **Be tactful.** If the person is working from home or from a shared workspace, emphasize that this is a private meeting. Make sure that both of you are somewhere quiet where you will not be disturbed and where others won't be able to overhear you.
- **Follow up in writing.** It can be hard to take in this type of news, particularly when it's delivered remotely. So, put what was discussed in writing and send it to the employee straight after the call. (It's a good idea to have another person on the call with you to verify what happened, and to take notes).
- **Have tech support in place.** If the employee is leaving with immediate effect, you may need to have their IT access removed promptly. So, let your systems and IT department know when to remove logins and access.

After Letting Someone Go

The practical arrangements for someone's departure will depend on the circumstances, but they should always be spelled out clearly – and managed kindly but firmly.

There are rights and responsibilities on both sides. The person needs to be able to collect their belongings and should be given an opportunity to say a proper farewell to their co-workers. At the same time, the organization needs to ensure that its equipment is returned and that access to the premises – and to systems and data – is removed. All of this can be done amicably.

Sometimes, however, this part of the process needs to be done quickly and under close supervision, and you must be ready to do that if required.

Don't shy away from addressing the issue with the rest of your team. They will likely feel unsettled by the news, so it's important that you clearly explain what's happened and give them an opportunity to raise any concerns or questions they might have.

You'll also need to outline how the termination will affect the team. Will they be asked to pick up extra responsibilities? Or, if the role is still required, when will someone new be hired?

Keep the lines of communication open and be as transparent as possible. That way, you can carry out tough decisions honestly and fairly, while **maintaining trust** within your team.