

The Essential Guide to Socially Responsible Outplacement

For mid-sized businesses

Designed to help leaders and HR teams



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The importance of socially responsible outplacement

As businesses continue to navigate economic uncertainty, many leaders are making difficult talent-related decisions to safeguard their company. Some will move forward with furloughs while others will restructure and lay off parts of their workforce.

When it comes to layoffs, especially for medium-sized businesses, learning how to terminate employees in the best way possible is essential. Poorly communicated and conducted terminations show an immense lack of respect towards affected employees—at a time when they are most vulnerable. Their termination experience will live on in vivid detail after they've departed—in interactions with friends, family and other professionals. Each time the story is told, on and offline, it influences the way the marketplace perceives your company's brand.

Letting go of employees is never an easy aspect of running a business. For small and medium-sized businesses—where their employees feel like “family”—layoffs can be especially hard. Learning how to terminate with the utmost care and sensitivity can ensure that the people who are exiting the company leave on good terms. And those employees who remain stay focused and keep your company moving forward.



For more than 50 years, LHH has supported thousands of companies around the globe managing their downsizing process with a socially responsible approach that focuses on the individual needs both during and after a layoff notification. Our experience in this approach has led us to define several best practices for successful outcomes. This guide includes excerpts from resources we developed for our customers. We hope you find them helpful.

Planning for a layoff notification meeting

Layoffs are never easy, especially for mid-sized businesses. Having a process in place that focuses on the people will help alleviate any negativity and help to keep your remaining workforce strong.

Let's start by first understanding what a layoff notification meeting is:

A notification meeting is where the employer gives formal notice to an employee that his or her employment has ended.

The objectives for the notification meeting for the company are:

- ▶ To conduct a succinct, yet compassionate, separation meeting in a respectful manner that informs employees that their jobs are being eliminated and they are being separated
- ▶ To minimize the negative impact on employees leaving and staying
- ▶ To protect the company and employer brand, to the general public, and for future recruitment

The objectives for the notification meeting for the employee are:

- ▶ To hear and understand the message as it is intended
- ▶ To retain dignity throughout the process
- ▶ To understand what resources are available to them to assist with their transition and have support and guidance on what to do next

Careful preparation and planning before these meetings will be important to ensure the interaction between the employee and the employer go as smoothly as possible.

Pre-notification
checklist

Day of notification
checklist

Post-notification
checklist

Pre-notification meeting checklist

- **Prepare a script.** This is a difficult conversation to have and it's easy to forget things. Practice the message you will deliver – you want to be genuine in your communication.
- **Provide resources.** It can be a nice gesture to provide the laid-off employee with some materials to help them out. These may include outplacement services that provide job search resources and resume development, information about unemployment insurance, or any other guidance they may need.
- **Schedule at an appropriate time.** Select a time early in the day for the meeting. Do not schedule on a day before a weekend or a holiday. If employees have questions, you don't want to make them have to wait.
- **Be mindful of significant dates and information.** Be considerate of the notification day in relation to significant dates (e.g., birthday or anniversary that day, personal circumstances etc.)
- **Consider additional support.** Depending upon your knowledge of an employee, you might want to have a counselor, experienced outplacement consultant or HR representative on call if needed.
- **Develop an asset return list.** Create a list of items that the employee will need to return on the day of departure (laptop, mobile phone etc.)

Take the necessary time to make proper arrangements for the notification meeting

- ▶ Select a place where you will have privacy. This can sometimes be hard in a small company, so make sure you plan to secure a space in advance.
- ▶ Plan for uninterrupted time.
- ▶ Allow enough time to complete the meeting without being rushed, including giving the employee time to ask questions.
- ▶ Try to anticipate questions ahead of time and have the answers to those questions available. Remember to have tissues and water available.

Notification day checklist

Notification meetings should be conducted face-to-face. Although texting and emailing may play an important role in your company's communications, a few conversations still work best face-to-face. Laying off an employee is one of those moments.

- **Stick to the script.** Don't engage in small talk. Get to the point and be clear – the employee should know within the first two or three sentences that his/her employment is being impacted and why.
- **Be sensitive to the employee's situation.** Be direct but with a compassionate, empathetic tone.
- **Give them time to process the message.** Despite the time-sensitivity, it is important that the employee not feel rushed. Listen, wait and be OK with some silence while the message is sinking in. Restate the message if necessary.
- **Allow them to ask questions.** Give the employee the opportunity to ask any questions they may have. Let them know they can come back with questions if they need time to process.
- **Let a professional address difficult situations.** If an employee shows signs of aggression or shock (moving around the room; verbal attacks; relentless questioning "why"; confused; disoriented; no reaction at all) let your HR representative, professional outplacement consultant or counselor take the lead in handling the situation.

Handling difficult questions

Impacted employees sometimes ask questions which can lead to drawn-out and non-productive conversations. Your job is to manage and guide the dialogue.

- ▶ If you don't have the answer, get clarity - be open and forthright with the facts.
- ▶ Repeat the business rationale (broken record technique).
- ▶ Reaffirm the difficulty of the decision and its finality.
- ▶ Indicate that you will be available for additional questions in the coming days.

How to deal with emotional reactions

If you're laying off a lot of employees in one day, you'll likely notice that people react to layoffs in different ways. Some will reach acceptance immediately. Others might cry. Some might get angry.

If crying occurs

- ▶ Offer tissues. Permit the employee time to be alone if needed. Be supportive, but refrain from touching the employee. Be patient with them.

If anger occurs

- ▶ Stay calm, anger is a normal response. Express empathy. Do not exchange hostilities. If the behaviors persist beyond your initial attempt to calm the person down, let your HR representative or professional outplacement consultant take the lead on handling the situation.

If shock and disbelief occurs

- ▶ Take your time, re-state the message. Indicate that there will be many opportunities to answer questions. Defer to HR if applicable.

If denial occurs

- ▶ Reiterate that the decision is final and defer to HR if applicable.

If panic occurs

- ▶ Reconfirm that support and resources are available. Suggest taking a few minutes with your outplacement consultant and/or EAP.

If sadness occurs

- ▶ Acknowledge the difficulty of the message. Reconfirm that support and resources are available. Suggest taking a few minutes with your outplacement consultant and/or EAP.

If threats occur

- ▶ Acknowledge your concern in their behavior. Stay calm and do not get baited into an argument. Offer them time to cool down. Suggest taking a few minutes with your outplacement consultant and/or EAP.

End the process amicably

In some instances, for security reasons, laid-off employees often need to exit their place of work immediately. Find a way to facilitate this while providing dignity to your exiting personnel. We recommend offering the employees options on how they will collect their belongings, communicate to co-workers and leave the office after being let go. With this small gesture, terminated employees are more likely to feel that they are departing on their own terms and with their dignity intact.

Post-notification checklist

Immediately after the last notification meeting, inform the remaining employees about the actions that have taken place. Understand that people may have lost friends and may have anxieties about their role and future at the company.

- Discuss workload and support concerns and needs. Focus on positives.
- Thank employees for their continued support.
- Ensure they understand that a fair process was followed, and the decision was given due consideration.
- Express that all alternatives were exhausted to minimize the impact on reductions.
- Reassure employees of their importance to the organization and that the organization is stable.
- Encourage employees to express concerns and ask questions

When personnel decisions are personal

Letting go of employees is tough for any company, but when the employee being laid off and the employer has a long work history and possibly even a personal friendship, the situation can become more stressful and tense. As a small business leader, you need to remember that, first and foremost, you're leading a business, and a little professionalism and planning can make the most uncomfortable termination easier.

Remember to plan ahead

Preparing for all possibilities and anticipating tough questions ahead of time can help address immediate concerns, provide support and guidance if necessary, and keep you on track. This is a difficult time. You need to stay focused.

Be concise and clear

The more succinct, clear and thorough the information you provide through the process, the less confusion, doubt and frustration the employees will have about the decisions that have been made. Practice your message, but know your limits. **If** you need help, ask for it. Reach out to your HR representative, or other colleagues and professionals for support. This is a difficult time. Don't go it alone.

Empathy is important

For leaders empathy remains your strongest tool, you must appreciate and prepare for the emotional health of your employees, both during and after their employment. This is a difficult time. Be there for your employees.

Support and services to consider

How employees handle layoffs tell a lasting story of a company's culture. For this reason, we recommend going above and beyond by offering career transition support and services for both the employees who are leaving as well as those who remain.



Outplacement

It's important that employees don't feel abandon and lost after being laid off. Offering outplacement services can help them make a seamless transition to a new career without all the stress and frustration. Outplacement provides support with job search, career development, resume writing, LinkedIn profile updates, interviewing skills, networking, career guidance and coaching.




Redeployment

An alternative to layoffs is offering employees an opportunity to redeploy into a new or different role within the company. Redeployment can help you fill open jobs with employees who have potential through reskilling and upskilling. And for those employees who must ultimately leave, it can help them prepare for their transition in advance, so they enter the market with confidence and speed.



Career Development

Retaining talent after a layoff can be a challenge, especially if there are no visible career opportunities, or supervisors/managers don't engage them in meaningful career conversations. The last thing you need is to lose a high-performing and high-potential employee. Offering career development solutions can empower employees to take ownership of their careers, inspire leaders to develop talent, and build your brand as a company that helps their people grow.



About LHH

At LHH, we help companies see the possibilities in their people. Through assessments, coaching, upskilling and transitioning, companies can realize the untapped potential within their own workforce, resulting in increased productivity, morale, and brand affinity.

Career transition and mobility

Elevate careers with upskilling, reskilling, redeployment and outplacement

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Coaching

Democratize and scale coaching across all levels of the organization

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Leadership development

Develop managers and leaders to successfully execute your business strategy

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Change management

Shift mindsets and develop capabilities to accelerate the results of change and transformation

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Assessments & analytics

Hire with confidence, know your people and make more informed talent decisions

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LHH can help build your workforce for today and tomorrow

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