

Terminations — making a difficult conversation easier



From meetings to chats with coworkers, talking keeps the workplace going round and even makes it a bit more fun. However, a termination talk? That's a different story! These challenging conversations are characterized by hesitation, reluctance, and a general uncertainty, but they're important conversations that must happen.

As a manager, you know that you've done your due diligence in determining the cause of termination, consulting with legal counsel, and giving the employee both written and verbal warnings. Hopefully you've created and implemented an employee improvement plan and given that employee time to think over their performance and the actions they must take if they wish to stay with the company.

Despite this, it is natural to experience the roller coaster of emotions; doubt, guilt, anxiety, and more. You've rehearsed the conversation in your head a million times and you're still apprehensive. That's normal, but termination conversations don't have to be so painful. Take the right steps to prepare and structure the conversation and you can make a difficult conversation easier to have.

Attitude is everything

Be sincere yet confident. Unless you're in a situation where unexpected downsizing is imminent, most employees in the termination phase are well aware of their situation. That means the termination conversation should come as no surprise. Despite this, human beings respond better to sincerity. This approach can go a long

way in alleviating any excessive tension during the talk.

While being sincere, also be confident in both your decision and in conveying the impending information. After all, you have done your homework and should be certain about your decision to terminate. However, don't let confidence become arrogance. The termination talk is not a blame game and the goal is not to degrade the employee. Instead, it should be an informative meeting to complete a proceeding, allow the employee to say what's on their mind, and handle any necessary documents to close their employment with your company.

Choose your words carefully

Some words have more aggressive tones than others and may set a negative tone for the conversation. For example, instead of saying "termination," consider saying "separation" when conversing with the employee. The term "firing" has extreme stigmas associated with it, which automatically results in a defensive reaction — so try to avoid it.

Additionally, instead of saying what the employee did "wrong," use phrases such as "could have improved on." This has a less negative connotation and is less likely to be disputed. Do not use obscure language or phrases, instead be direct and communicate all information clearly.

Location, location, location

The setting is just as important as the actual conversation. Termination proceedings can be humiliating so it is important to maintain the employee's dignity by conducting the meeting in a private setting, concealed from additional employees. A great option is a private conference room which is considered employee neutral since it belongs to neither the employee nor management.

Plan the beginning, middle, and end of your conversation

Managers love the idea of the "sandwich" concept. A sandwich has 3 basic parts, a bottom slice of bread, the fillings in between, and the top slice of bread. This structure can also be applied to your conversation. The bread represents the positive and the rest in the middle is the negative.

To begin the conversation, thank the employee for their service to your organization. This can reduce tension at the onset of the proceedings.

Then discuss issues the employee had while working for your company; be sure to provide specifics and examples of negative actions. Specific examples help the employee to see their lack of progress and better understand how we got here.

To conclude, say something positive to the employee. One typical closing statement is "we wish you best of luck in your future endeavors," which conveys sincerity and lacks hostility. Another option is "I believe that your talents will be best suited elsewhere," which conveys the notion that the employee indeed has talents, however, they were just not suitable for this role with your company. Definitely allow the employee the opportunity to speak upon the conclusion of the termination. This shows that, as a manager, you still care about employees' thoughts and opinions.

Terminations — undesirable but inevitable

Terminations are never easy tasks. No manager checks their calendar in the morning and is overcome with the excitement of a scheduled termination. However, it is a fundamental component of management and often necessary for the department and organization to achieve set goals. In these cases, treating the employee with respect and sincerity can go a long way in making the process go as smoothly as possible.