

Difficult & Crucial Workplace Conversations

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Introduction

- As much as many of us try to avoid these conversations, we know they must take place but:
 - Who – should have the conversation?
 - How – should the conversation be had?
 - When – should the conversation be held?
 - Where – should the conversation take place?
 - Why – should you even have the conversation?



Examples

- Poor Hygiene
- Performance
- Discipline
- Separations
 - Voluntary
 - Involuntary
- Death

Poor Hygiene

- Purpose:
 - Studies show that coworkers are affected by each other's cleanliness
 - Employee will be negatively perceived
 - Offensive to your customers/clients

Poor Hygiene

- Prior to the meeting:
 - Be certain - Is it a one time issue or is there a pattern?
 - Good timing - End of the day is best, as you do not want the employee feeling embarrassed and self-conscious for hours
 - Discuss in a private office - NEVER IN PUBLIC
 - Be direct, but sensitive
 - Pick your words carefully - DON'T say “several people have complained about your odor”

Poor Hygiene

- During the meeting:
 - Rule out a medical condition.
- Possible script:
 - “[name], I wanted to meet with you one-on-one because I need to share something with you privately and discreetly. You may not realize it, but it appears you have a body odor problem. Is there a medical condition that we need to be aware of?”
 - If “yes,” follow American with Disabilities guidelines and contact G&A Partners/employment counsel for assistance
 - If “no,” remind employee of the company’s grooming policy and ask that corrective action be taken immediately
- Facilitator: HR

Performance

- Purpose:
 - To place the employee on notice that he/she is not meeting the company's expectations
 - To give the employee ample time to take corrective action

Performance

- Prior to the meeting:
 - Ask yourself if the employee has been adequately trained and given the tools to perform his/her job successfully
 - If no, stop and provide the employee with the tools and training needed to improve his/her performance on their own
 - If yes, move forward with the conversation process
 - Gather supporting documentation (i.e. tasks and deadline misses, work product stats)
 - Determine fair and consistent expectations for performance
 - Determine fair and consistent consequences for non-compliance



Performance

- During the meeting:
 - Be honest
 - Be specific (who, what, when and where)
 - Documentation
 - Specific dates and incidents
 - Ask about roadblocks affecting the employee's performance
 - Ask the employee to come up with a solution/offer assistance



Performance

- During the meeting:
 - Request improvement by a certain date
 - Make sure the employee knows you/the company wants to see him/her succeed
 - Identify consequences of failure to meet expectations - don't cry wolf!
 - If applicable, thank the employee for their commitment to taking corrective action
 - Document the meeting - nothing but the facts!
 - Use clear language that focuses on results and behavior

Performance

- Possible script:
 - “[name], I asked to meet with you today to discuss an issue that we need your assistance to correct. It appears that for the last [number] weeks, you have [explain performance issue]. Is there a reason you’re having trouble meeting these company standards? [allow the employee to speak/offer an explanation]

This is unacceptable and cannot happen again. For this reason, we are placing you on a Performance Improvement Plan for the next [number] days. During this time you and I will meet on a regular basis to review your pending projects to make sure target deadlines are met. We will also be sending you to project management training. Our hope is that this additional training will aid you in improving these performance deficiencies. At the end of the [number] days we will meet again to determine if your improvement meets company standards. If it does not, you will be subject to additional disciplinary action, up to and including termination.”

- Facilitator: Manager/Supervisor

Discipline

- Purpose:
 - To create an atmosphere of respect and accountability that fosters productivity

Discipline

- Prior to the meeting:
 - Identify policy violated and how it was violated
 - Conduct investigation (gather the facts)
 - Research what has been done in the past for similarly situated employees
 - Review the employee's personnel file
 - Review the company's discipline policy
 - Determine punishment - must fit the crime
 - Determine who will witness the meeting



Discipline

- During the meeting:
 - Be direct
 - State the reason for the meeting
 - Allow the employee to speak and ask questions
 - Advise the employee of the level of discipline and the punishment
 - Provide employee with specific consequences of the infraction

Discipline

- Possible script:
 - “[name], it has come to our attention that you [explain violation]. We conducted an investigation and have determined that you have violated the company’s Code of Conduct policy. What do you have to say?”

Due to the nature of the violation and your record with the company, you will be [explain consequence]. Should this happen again, you may be subject to further disciplinary action, up to and including termination. Do you have any questions?

We value your contribution to the company and going forward it is our hope that you adhere to all company policies.”

- Facilitator: Manager/Supervisor



Separations

- Resignations
- Layoffs
- Terminations

Resignations

- Prior to the meeting:
 - Determine if the employee is leaving on good standing
 - Review the employee's personnel file to make sure there are no outstanding issues or complaints
 - Determine if you will allow the employee to work the notice period
 - Prepare a transition plan

Resignations

- Prior to the meeting:
 - Prepare communications
 - Determine if an exit interview is warranted
 - Prepare a checklist of company property currently in the employee's possession
 - Notify I.T. for access removal

Resignations

- During the meeting:
 - Engage in warm and friendly conversation about the employee's future plans
 - The goal is to try to understand why the person is leaving
 - Advise the employee when he/she can expect final wages
 - If applicable, advise the employee of benefits continuation
 - Gather company property
 - Thank the employee for his/her contributions to the company
 - Ask the employee if he/she is willing to do an exit interview

Resignations

- Possible Script:
 - “[name], being that today is your last day with our company, I wanted to meet with you to make sure you understand our separation process. As such:
 - You will receive your final wages on [date].
 - Per company policy, you [will/will not] be paid for any accrued and unused PTO.
 - You will receive information in the mail about benefit continuation
 - I need to get back from you the following items [list items from checklist]
 - By the way, here is our exit interview questionnaire. We welcome feedback on how we can make the company a great place to work. We would appreciate it if you would complete and mail it back.
 - Thank you for your years of service and contributions to the company. We wish you much success in your next professional journey.”
- Facilitator: Manager w/HR support

Layoffs

- Prior to the meeting:
 - Confirm the company is not subject to the Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act (WARN Act)
 - 60 day notice
 - Employers with 100 or more full-time employees
 - Employment loss of 50 or more at a single site of employment
 - Determine if severance packages w/be given and, if yes, how much
 - Determine if employees will be required to sign releases in exchange for severance pay
 - Determine who will be subject to layoff and why (make a business case)
 - Document your selection process

Layoffs

- Prior to the meeting:
 - Determine Older Worker Benefit Protection Act needs
 - Employees 40 or older
 - Two or more employees being laid off
 - Prepare a transition plan
 - Prepare a communication plan
 - Prepare a checklist of company property currently in the employee's possession
 - Notify I.T. for access removal

Layoffs

- During the meeting:
 - Be the messenger and take the heat
 - When possible, in-person is best
 - Be direct – Small talk during a layoff only adds insult to injury
 - Be honest – Don't call it a layoff unless it actually is a layoff
 - Don't blame the decision on anyone else
 - Direct questions to a pre-determined single point of contact

Separations Involuntary - Layoffs

- Possible Script:
 - “I’ve called this meeting because I must inform you that due to [reason for layoff], your position with the company is being eliminated effective [date]. Unfortunately, we do not have another position available for you. HR will work with you to complete your transition. This decision was made after a long and careful review of the options available, realizing that some people will be affected at no fault of their own. This was a very difficult decision and careful consideration was given. It was also reviewed at the highest levels within the organization and the decision is final. I must now inform you that:
 - You will receive your final wages on [date].
 - Per company policy, you [will/will not] be paid for any accrued and unused PTO.
 - You will receive information in the mail about benefit continuation
 - I need to get back from you the following items [list items from checklist]
 - If you have any questions, please contact [name]”
- Facilitator: Manager w/ HR Support

Terminations

- Purpose:
 - Result of poor performance or violation of company policy
 - Termination should never be a surprise
 - Decision should be lawful and consistent with company practices and policies
 - Last resort
 - Regardless of the reason for the termination, maintain the employee's dignity

Terminations

- Prior to the meeting:
 - Determine the following:
 - Is the reason for termination lawful and in accordance with company policies and practices?
 - If your company has a progressive discipline policy, does it allow you to bypass the steps and go straight to termination?
 - What has been done to other employees who violated the same policy?
 - Is this an “at-will” employee, or does the employee have an employment contract?
 - Is there a union involved?

Terminations

- Prior to the meeting:
 - Review the employees personnel file for potential issues
 - Has the employee filed any complaints?
 - Is there sufficient documentation in the file to substantiate termination?
 - Is there anything in the file that might be evidence of an illegal termination?
 - Prepare a transition plan
 - Prepare communication plan
 - Prepare a checklist of company property currently in the employee's possession
 - Notify I.T. for access removal

Terminations

- During the meeting:
 - Briefly explain the reason for the termination in an objective and professional tone - tell the truth
 - Begin by informing the employee he/she is being terminated as of a particular date
 - No apologies
 - Keep it simple - avoid an argument
 - Be focused and direct - the decision is final

Terminations

- Possible script:
 - “[name], I’ve called this meeting because I must inform you that we’ve decided to let you go effective [date]. The reason for this decision is [explain the reason]. Do you have any questions?”

I must now inform you that:

- You will receive your final wages on [date].
- Per company policy, you [will/will not] be paid for any accrued and unused PTO.
- You will receive information in the mail about benefit continuation
- I need to get back from you the following items [list items from checklist]

Please let me know if you have any questions. Thank you for your contributions, and we wish you much success in your future endeavors.”

- Facilitator: Manager w/HR Support

Death of a Coworker

- Purpose:
 - To communicate the death of a coworker to staff
- Things to keep in mind:
 - Work family
 - Time spend at work
 - Bonds and friendships
 - Self-care
 - Embrace your own emotions
 - Talk to someone

Death of a Coworker

- Prior to the meeting:
 - Determine how much information to share
 - Get the family's permission - Ask what information they are comfortable with you sharing
 - Ask if the family is comfortable with coworkers attending any service
 - Be sensitive, but direct
 - Arrange for grief counselors
 - G&A Partners can assist you/check EAP
 - Determine the best time and place

Death of a Coworker

- During the meeting:
 - Be supportive
 - Be prepared for all sorts of emotions
 - Instruct employees on how to take advantage of grief counseling (if offered)
 - Give employees time to share memories
 - Check back with employees
 - Create a flexible plan so that every employee is afforded the opportunity to pay their respects without disrupting business operations
 - Be prepared for “business as usual” to be tricky
 - Productivity and motivation will be slow for a while
 - Delicately delegate the work of the deceased employee

Death of a Coworker

- Possible Script:
 - “I regret to inform you that [name] passed on [date]. The family is keeping the details private, and we ask that you respected their wishes. If and when the family provides us with information on funeral services we will let you know.

We understand that this loss is very upsetting, and for this reason we have arranged for a grief counselor to be here to speak privately with anyone wishing to utilize their services. Tomorrow I will be checking back with everyone. This is a very sad time for all of us.”

- Facilitator: Manager w/HR support

Death of a Coworker

- After the meeting:
 - At an appropriate time, meet with the family to allow them to:
 - Gather the deceased employee's personal belongings (preferably after hours or on the weekend)
 - Meet with HR to prepare any insurance information
 - Prepare a transition plan
 - Notify I.T. for access removal



Q&A

#AskMDE



If we didn't get to your question during today's presentation, tweet us ([@GAPartners](#)) using [#AskMDE](#), and our experts will reply with an answer shortly!

Or, you can email your questions to info@gnapartners.com.

Reminders

- The recording of this webinar will be available on the G&A Partners website soon (www.gnapartners.com).
- This webinar has been pre-certified for 1 hour of general recertification credit toward PHR, SPHR and GPHR recertification through the HR Certification Institute.

We will send out an email to all those who are confirmed as attended with the program ID code to note on your HRCI recertification application form.



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