

# A Manager's Guide for Terminations



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## Preparing for a Termination

No one enjoys being the bearer of bad news, but terminations are a fact of life for most managers. Besides mentally preparing yourself for this sensitive task, you need to ensure you are careful with how you broach the subject with your employee(s); a misstep could lead to legal trouble later on. Use the checklists, script and FAQs included in this guide to help you navigate this delicate situation.

## Termination Checklist

### Coordinate Logistics:

- Receive approvals from human resources
- Schedule manager/employee appointment
- Identify emergency information on hand; physical problems
- Select outplacement support
- Arrange logistics/transition of work responsibilities
- Arrange security check-out

### Prepare Materials:

- Have documentation and/or performance appraisals on hand

Prepare severance materials in writing:

- Notification letter (working and nonworking notice)
- Salary continuation/severance period
- Benefits
- Life insurance
- Lump sum settlements
- Accrued vacation
- Profit sharing
- Stock options
- Bonus
- Outplacement counseling
- Automobile

**Prepare Message:**

- Prepare script in writing
- Prepare announcement to remaining employees

**Arrange Next Steps:**

- Schedule additional meetings: Corporate HR/Benefits

Emotionally prepare yourself:

- Prepare, anticipate and respond to employees' reactions
- Discuss and acknowledge manager's feelings

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# How to Manage a Termination

Use the following outline as a script to help you prepare for the discussion. Be sure to rely upon the written documentation or rationale that you have prepared in advance of the meeting.

## Coordinate Logistics:

- Briefly describe the decision and the reason for it
- Specify the employee's termination date
- Explain why the employee was identified for termination
- State that the decision has been reviewed and is final
- Give the employee his/her notification letter and review:
  - Length of notice: working/nonworking
  - Salary continuation/severance
  - Benefits
  - Outplacement – if any
  - Other
- Listen to the employee, but do not indicate any willingness to reverse the decision
- Review the logistics of the transition:
  - Transfer of projects
  - Clearing of office/workspace
  - Security check-out
  - Immediate next steps
- Respond appropriately to the employee's reaction

# The Do's and Dont's For Conducting a Termination Meeting

## Do:

- Invite the employee to sit down
- Get right to the point
- Explain the actions taken and the reasons
- Listen to the employee and wait for a response
- Restate the message if necessary
- Use your prepared notes/guidelines
- Clarify the termination date
- Give an overview of the termination package
- Explain the logistics for leaving the company
- Provide appropriate written materials
- Close the meeting within 15 minutes
- Escort the employee to the next appointment

## Don't:

- Don't say, "Good to see you" or, "How are you?"
- Don't engage in small talk
- Don't use humor
- Don't be apologetic
- Don't defend, justify, or argue
- Don't threaten
- Don't discuss other employees
- Don't sympathize
- Don't try to minimize the situation
- Don't make promises
- Don't personalize the anger
- Don't deviate from your script/notes
- Don't use platitudes like, "I know how you feel," or, "You will be just fine," "It's always the darkest before dawn"

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# Suggested Responses for Frequently Asked Questions from Employees

Providing appropriate and consistent responses to statements to terminated employees is extremely important. If you are unsure of any answers relating to benefits, salary, unemployment or other areas, refer the employee to your HR department.

The reactions and responses below are general examples of how others have dealt effectively with these issues but the responses you prepare need to reflect the specific policies of your company and may differ from what is suggested below.

## Why was I selected?

This decision was based on several factors including job skills, work experience, company needs, tenure, and performance. These decisions are always difficult but they have been reviewed and approved by leadership.

## Who made the final decision?

I made the final decision, but I should add that the decision was reviewed and approved by leadership and HR.

## What options do I have?

Employees are always welcome to talk to a high level of management, but I will tell you that this decision was carefully reviewed prior to this meeting and it is unlikely that the outcome will change.

## Can I continue to work for a period of time?

At this time, it would be best to use the time to take care of yourself and begin exploring other employment opportunities. HR has a packet of information that should be helpful in assisting you with where to go for additional support.

## Can I be rehired?

You are eligible for rehire (if that is true) but the probability of that happening is unlikely. That is why you should focus your efforts on finding employment outside the company.

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### **How will you handle my references?**

By policy, the company limits release of personal information to external requesters. The HR department will provide potential new employers with dates of employment and job titles only.

### **I want to talk to your boss.**

Of course, you are free to make an appointment to talk to him/her, but I must tell you that he/she is fully aware of the decision and supports it.

### **In an organization this large, I can't understand why I can't be considered for something else.**

Before this decision was made every effort was made to explore other options.

### **I don't want to talk about this without my lawyer.**

You are, of course, free to have your legal representative contact us. However, our present commitment is to help you get re-established as quickly as possible. I strongly suggest you keep your appointment with HR to review your separation package.

### **How can you do this to me after X years?**

A lot of good people were impacted by this. This was a business decision for business reasons.

### **Was John Doe let go, too?**

I'm not in a position to discuss details about other employees. I'm sure you'd appreciate the same consideration extended to you.

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# Answers to Your Most Frequently Asked Questions

These questions were asked during the Q&A session of our “[Leading & Letting Go: A Manager’s Guide for Terminations](#)” webinar on Thursday, May 28, 2020. We have asked our presenters, Michelle Mikesell, Sean O’Donnell and Steve Moore to answer them.

## **Our employees work from home/remotely. How do you recommend we conduct a termination meeting if we aren’t in the office?**

In most cases, video conferencing is the best option if you are a virtual organization. This will allow you to gauge the employee’s reaction and respond to their emotions. Make sure your environment—such as your background is professional and free from distraction. We recommend that you make arrangements for a courier to pick up essential items such as a company phone, laptop or other items from the employees’ home (from the doorstep) and decide who in your organization should receive those.

## **Is having a witness present during a termination meeting a legal requirement or more of a suggestion?**

This is not a legal requirement but a best practice we highly encourage.

## **Should I explain the reason of termination to the rest of the team?**

You should maintain the confidentiality of the employee leaving the company and not discuss the details of the termination with anyone outside of those who are on a need-to-know basis.

## **I’ve been instructed to address the terminating reason as "going a different direction" and be less specific. Is this the proper way to go?**

Best practices would suggest that you provide the employee with the feedback on why a "different direction" is needed.

## **Saying "I'm sorry" comes natural to me when giving bad news. What is your advice for a manager who may say this during a termination meeting?**

Saying “I’m sorry” when terminating a person for their poor performance is not recommended. You can, however, say you are sorry if the conditions are a no-fault lay-off and the person is losing their job through no fault of their own.



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## **Is it advisable to terminate employees who have been furloughed based on their performance prior to a pandemic/crisis? Also, how should the termination be presented to the employee?**

A business has a right and responsibility to manage employee performances at all times. If you have exhausted every alternative, then a termination may be necessary even during a pandemic or crisis. The reason, however, would be for performance and the employee should not be made to believe that their termination was related to the pandemic.

## **Can you provide some suggestions on how to train a manager who chronically wants to "fire on the spot"?**

Firing on the spot is almost never the right approach. Consider instituting a policy where managers have the authority to send someone home for the day, but do not have the authority to terminate without a second reviewer such as HR or upper management. This should build in some time and space to collect data and make an informed and better-documented decision.

## **Is it advisable to discuss final pay, commissions owed, upcoming bonus, etc. During the termination meeting?**

You should have the details of their pay prepared in advance of the meeting and refer to those details as you outline next steps at the end of the meeting. It's typically best to give the terminating employee the details in writing so they can read through them in detail after the meeting.

## **How should I prepare to terminate an employee who may become violent or will make a scene when leaving the premises?**

If you feel that a person may become upset or angry during the termination meeting, you may want to make arrangements to have the conversation when there are fewer people in the office. People are typically less inclined to act out in this way if they don't have an audience. You may also want to have security on hand so they can escort the person out of the office if necessary.

It is also critical that you are aware of your surroundings. One way to coach employees and managers on this is to provide them with annual workplace violence training to help them recognize the signs.

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## **Our organization is currently transitioning after being acquired by another company. Does the pre-termination coaching still apply to this kind of termination?**

If the person is involved in a “no-fault” reduction in force, then you would still structure the meeting the same way but the emphasis would be placed on the decision to terminate being a business reason and not about the employee’s performance.

## **If an entire team is being terminated, what is the best way to go about this?**

If everyone in a department is being let go and it is a "no-fault" separation, then you can bring everyone together and conduct a group notification.

## **What is HR’s role in helping managers with terminations?**

We would encourage HR to partner with the executives within your company on providing Termination Training to all managers. This will help set clear expectations for how the process should take place and may help promote the value of a solid partnership with HR on these matters.

## **One of my employees has threatened to quit multiple times. Any advice?**

If an employee threatens to quit you should find out why they wish to quit. If they have legitimate concerns that are causing the problem, then address them. In the event an employee threatens to quit you can also ask them if they are informing you of their resignation and if so have them identify the date they wish to resign. Employers should not feel like they are held hostage by an employee’s threats. Giving in to them is a recipe for continued threats in the future.