



A Managers Guide to Conducting a Layoff Notification Meeting

Delivering a layoff notification is one of the most difficult responsibilities a manager will face. These conversations are not only emotionally charged but also carry significant implications for the individual, the team, and the organization. The way a layoff meeting is conducted can shape how the impacted employee experiences the transition, influence how the remaining staff perceive leadership, and reduce potential legal or reputational risks. This guide is designed to help managers prepare for, conduct, and follow up on layoff notification meetings with clarity, compassion, and professionalism, ensuring that the process is handled with respect and care for everyone involved.

Preparing for a Layoff Notification

- Consult with your HR Representative.
- Review the [University Policy 6.12](#) Separations, Voluntary and Involuntary (Including Layoff). One of the best ways to reduce legal risk is knowledge of and adherence to relevant policies.
- Obtain a layoff packet and notification letter from HR to give to the impacted individual(s) and review in advance of the meeting.
- Understand the reason for the layoff/early termination and selection criteria.
- Come to terms with the business decision; own the decision.
- Determine where the notification will take place— a quiet and confidential space.
- Determine who will attend the meeting.
- Determine if any on-site resources are needed and schedule (FSAP, Talent Transition Services, Community Response Team).
- Identify someone to schedule the meeting; prepare them for questions.
- Avoid a date that is before a holiday, weekend, vacation or other known special day
- Schedule adequate time – schedule 30 minutes; plan to close the meeting within 15 minutes.
- List the items that you will cover in the meeting and write a script.
- Practice delivery – say it out loud.
- Prepare for various reactions – often the anticipated reaction is not what will result prepare for various scenarios.

- Understand next steps (rest of the day, rest of the week, during notice period, etc.).
- Prepare to inform the remaining staff once all of the impacted employees have been notified.

The Day of the Meeting

- Turn off your cell phone and forward your office phone to voicemail.
- Greet the individual and invite them to have a seat, avoid small talk.
- Be direct but compassionate and slow your speech.
- Set the stage by providing some specifics on the situation including the business decision, this will help provide context but get to the point as soon as possible.
- Announce the layoff clearly and definitively.
- Communicate that you support the decision and don't blame others or add personal opinion.
- Appreciate and recognize the individuals' contributions.
- Provide them with the appropriate materials, layoff packet and notification letter.
- Clarify that they understand what you have explained.
- Wait for a response and listen to the individual.
- Maintain eye contact and remain calm.
- Document responses that may be of concern.
- Empathize with the individuals' position.
- Reference layoff benefits and services.
- If applicable inform the employee that they will be working through the notice period.
- Offer support by making yourself available to answer questions, and to help connect them with resources such as FSAP, HR or Talent Transition Services.
- Advise the individual that a follow-up meeting will be scheduled to discuss next steps including steps to transition the work as appropriate.
- Offer the option to take the rest of the day off with pay or return to work

Situations to Avoid During a Notification Meeting

- Making side comments that could confuse the message.
- Making small talk or joking.
- Blaming others.
- Apologizing.
- Arguing.
- Discussion with other employees.
- Explaining how hard this was for you.
- Point out the advantages.
- Assume that you know their situation.
- Promising more than you can deliver.
- Get into the role of counselor.
- Assume that they heard you correctly.
- Read the layoff letter out loud.
- Advise in areas outside of your field of knowledge.
- Saying things like “I know how you feel” or “everything will be ok”.
- Drag the meeting out longer than necessary.

Commonly Asked Questions

“Why was my position selected for elimination?”

“It was a very difficult business decision. Please do not take this personally; when a reduction in force occurs, positions are eliminated. The people who are attached to those positions are then laid off. Selecting positions for elimination is very difficult because people’s lives will be impacted.”

“Who else is being laid off? Am I the only one in our department? Why me?”

“At this point I am not able to share who else will be laid off. We haven’t spoken to the individuals yet, so I would ask that you allow me to hold off on answering that for now, **OR**, Yes, yours is the only position in our department that is being eliminated. I want you to know that you are eligible to be rehired into an available position at the university in the future.

Unfortunately, we had to eliminate one position, and purely from a functional standpoint, your position made the most sense.”

“How can that be? Who is going to do all the work when I am gone?”

“With the elimination of your position others in the department will have to take on the job duties that you have handled up to now.”

“Wait, you can’t lay me off and keep John. I have more years of service than he does.”

“I recognize that, however, I want you to know that we considered tenure in our decision. We also looked at performance appraisals, progressive disciplinary warnings, attendance records, education levels, technical certifications, and skills when determining who would be qualified to assume the duties after the reduction in workforce. Are there any other questions that I can answer for you?”

Engaging the Survivors

Plan to have a department meeting once all of the impacted parties have been notified.

- Give those impacted a choice of attending the meeting or not.
- Use the meeting as an opportunity to cement loyalty and to encourage forward-looking attitudes.
- Be prepared to answers questions such as, "Who is being laid off? Will there be more layoffs? How will the remaining work get done with fewer people?"
- Be mindful that the employees who remain will feel a sense of guilt. It is important to communicate directly with “survivors” because these employees also feel the impact of their co-worker's layoff as well as increased uncertainty, “survivor guilt” and/or the impact of changes in their work.
- Be as transparent as possible to dispel rumors or inaccurate information.
- Provide open and empathic communication to employees throughout the layoff process. This promotes trust and can reduce problems with morale and productivity.
- Communicate with employees before, during, and after downsizing to the extent possible, both formally and informally. This could include staff meetings, newsletters, memos, e-mails as well as one-to-one and group meeting.