Working at Cornell
PURSUE EXCELLENCE. DISCOVER SUCCESS.

Supporting Your Team After a Layoff

Layoffs can leave remaining employees feeling anxious, guilty, uncertain, or even resentful. This can impact not only individual employees' mental health and wellbeing, but also your team's workplace dynamics and effectiveness. As a manager, your role is to help your team process the change, restore trust, and foster resilience. Below are practical steps you can take.

Acknowledge the Reality

- **Address the layoff directly:** Don't avoid the topic. Share what you can (without violating confidentiality) to prevent rumors from filling the gap.
- **Acknowledge emotions:** People may feel sadness, guilt ("survivor's guilt"), anger, or fear. Validating these reactions helps employees feel seen and heard.
- **Be human:** It's okay to show empathy and even your own feelings of loss.

Communicate Clearly and Transparently

- **Share what you know:** Explain the reasons for the layoff at a high level if leadership hasn't already. Avoid speculation.
- **Clarify what's next:** Outline any changes in roles, responsibilities, or team goals.
- **Provide stability:** Reinforce what is not changing to help re-establish a sense of predictability.

Support Emotional Wellbeing

- **Encourage open conversation:** Hold a team meeting and offer 1:1 check-ins so employees can ask questions in different settings.
- **Point to resources:** Remind the team of available supports (FSAP, mental health benefits, HR contacts).
- **Be attentive:** Watch for signs of burnout, withdrawal, or overwhelm, and step in early.

Rebuild Trust and Morale

- **Recognize survivor's guilt:** Employees may feel conflicted about staying. Acknowledge this dynamic openly.
- **Acknowledge contributions:** Appreciate the work of those who remain, without dismissing the loss of those who left.
- **Involve the team:** Invite input on how to adjust workflows, processes, or culture moving forward.

Reset Workloads and Expectations

- **Reassess priorities:** Don't simply redistribute all the work. Identify what truly matters and adjust goals accordingly.
- **Clarify roles:** Ensure each person understands their updated responsibilities.
- **Set realistic expectations:** Overloading staff after layoffs risks further disengagement or turnover.

Lead with Visibility and Consistency

- **Be present:** Spend more time with your team in the days following the change.
- **Communicate often:** Even if you don't have all the answers, regular updates show that you're engaged.
- **Model resilience:** Show calm and steadiness—without minimizing the challenges.

Focus on the Future

- **Reinforce purpose:** Connect the team's work to the broader mission and values.
- **Highlight opportunities:** Where appropriate, frame change as a chance to innovate or refine.
- **Build momentum gradually:** Recognize it takes time to recover trust, morale, and focus.

Quick Do's and Don'ts

- **Do:** Listen actively, communicate frequently, adjust goals realistically, and show empathy.
- **Don't:** Pretend nothing happened, overload the team, make promises you can't keep, or dismiss concerns as "negativity."

Last updated October 2025

Cornell Faculty and Staff Assistance Program
fsap.cornell.edu | fsap@cornell.edu | 607-255-2673
15 Thornwood Drive, Ithaca, NY 14850