CLARITY
HR SOLUTIONS

An Employer's Guide to Communicating with Stakeholders Following an Involuntary Separation

It is essential to promptly communicate an employment separation to the remaining workforce and clients/customers. This is especially true when the organization ended the employment relationship.

Communicating with the Leadership Team and Employees.

1.) Promptly communicate to your Leadership Team.

It is typically helpful to communicate first with your Leadership Team before communicating to other employees or clients/customers. Be sure to give accurate communication, but be cautious of details and protect the former employee's confidentiality. It is important for Leadership to know how they should respond to any questions or concerns from employees, so messaging is consistent and confidentiality is maintained.

Share any potential risks (e.g., a former employee may be violent or is likely to file a lawsuit). Share what steps are being taken to address the situation and reduce the risk and identify the contact for any additional questions.

Promptly communicate with employees.

Prompt communication to employees after the employee's departure helps minimize rumors and gossip and ensure that the work transition occurs more smoothly. Prompt communication shows employees that the employer - not the rumor mill - is the best information source.

We recommend that managers/supervisors communicate with their teams. The best avenue for communicating with employees may vary depending on the employer's size and situation. Face-to-face meetings are generally preferable, as they are generally more personal and give employees the chance to ask questions about how the change may affect them. That said, it may be necessary to send a more direct message to employees. In those cases, we recommend having a short message [script] ready that lets employees know that their manager/supervisor will be providing more information shortly. In any case, we recommend you

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communicate with members of the affected departments as soon as practicable and keep communication lines open.

2.) Be brief.

The best response is short and contains only the need-to-know details, such as "Mary's last day will be Friday. Until we find a replacement, Joe and Sue will share her duties." The longer the explanation about a termination decision, the more likely it will confuse employees or cause employees to ask questions about confidential personnel information.

If employees request information regarding the reasons the individual's employment ended, we recommend advising employees that personnel matters are confidential and ask them to respect their privacy.

In some cases, the organization and departing employee may negotiate a communication about the employment termination. In those cases, managers should, of course, use the negotiated language.

If there are special safety concerns, be sure to be prepared to address those. In some cases, law enforcement involvement may be appropriate. We recommend that you work with your legal counsel in those situations.

3.) Identify the continuity plan.

Employees may be concerned about who will handle the departing employee's workload until a replacement is found. Managers should quickly identify and communicate how the individual's responsibilities will be absorbed into the organization.

Possible approaches include:

1. assigning to one person;
2. dividing among various employees;
3. outsourcing or engaging temporary assistance;
4. temporarily discontinuing nonessential tasks; or
5. having a manager handle workload until a replacement is found.

4.) Revisit values and conduct.

Where the individual's employment ended for misconduct/policy violations, consider reviewing relevant policy requirements with employees to ensure that those requirements are clear. We generally recommend that you do so separately from the initial communication meeting and without reference to the departing employee. However, there may be times where providing the information in the same discussion is an excellent strategic move. We still recommend no reference to the departing employee in such cases.

[Optional]

Communicating with Customers and Clients.

1. **Contact Customers and Clients, if appropriate.**

Notify affected clients/customers as soon as it is practicable. The focus of the contact should be to notify the client of an interim contact or replacement. If the transition is amicable, you may wish to include the outgoing employee in the communication process. Be prepared to answer questions, keeping in mind employee confidentiality issues. Communications should be truthful, and care should be taken to avoid any statements that could be viewed as defamatory.

Some organizations find it helpful to meet with clients/customers - in person or by phone - to assess the status of any ongoing services/projects and to address any client/customer relations issues that may have resulted from the departing employee's performance/misconduct. Additionally, we recommend periodic check-ins with clients/customers in the weeks/months following the transition to ensure that any client/customer questions/concerns have been addressed. These check-ins may be more frequent at the onset until the parties are assured that the transition has been successful.