

Here's How to Deliver A Pink Slip—Gracefully

Losing a job is traumatic, not only for the employee being dismissed, but also for the manager who must deliver the unwelcome news.

"Being fired is one of life's toughest experiences," says Bob Beal, vice president and general manager of Chicago-based Jannotta, Bray and Associates, an outplacement firm with offices in five U.S. cities. "There is a tremendous loss of self-esteem because individuals in our society are strongly identified with their work.

"It's a shock to the dismissed person to find himself without a job," Beal adds. "He needs support from someone to whom he can vent his feelings."

"A termination interview has been the cause of many sleepless nights for managers," says Bob Scheid of Humber, Mundie & McClary, a firm of industrial psychologists with clients nationwide. "But preparation helps the employee, and usually has a positive effect on what happens afterward."

According to Scheid, it's important for the employee that the dismissal be conducted in a humanitarian manner. But it's also crucial for the company, because any dismissal has the potential for serious consequences in company morale, public relations, future hiring and potential litigation.

"Dismissing someone from the company is probably the least favorite task for managers," agrees Phyllis Piano, a spokesperson for General Electric Medical Services. "But we think there is a way of terminating that is fair to the employee, and we do provide some training to help our managers handle these situations."

The face-to-face dismissals of the modern business world are a far cry from the early decades of this century, when termination notices came in the form of "pink slips" in pay envelopes.

Today human resources professionals recommend dismissing employees humanely. For example, they recom-

mend that managers never fire an employee on a Friday. There's too much time over the weekend for brooding thoughts of depression, anger and revenge.

Other suggestions:

Never surprise a person with a dismissal from the company. The termination should come only after a series of reviews that pinpoint performance deficiencies and indicate suggestions for correcting them.

Limit the actual termination interview to 15 minutes. Briefly and in a nonjudgmental way, the manager should make the dismissal and give the supporting reasons. Then he should listen, allowing the employee chance to react. He can then discuss the severance package and present it to the employee in writing.

Indicate what the next step will be. Depending on individual company procedures, the manager might suggest that the dismissed employee take the rest of the day off, direct the person to human resources for counseling, or introduce the outplacement professional waiting in the next room to help him begin the new job search.

As a safeguard many companies move quickly to cancel the terminated employee's access to the company computers and premises. At Harley-Davidson, for example, the dismissed person is escorted from the building and the systems staff is notified to cancel the employee's computer access.

GE Medical Systems protects the company by conducting an interview with the dismissed employee in which a company representative explains the necessity for keeping sensitive high-tech information safe from competitors. The dismissed person is asked to turn in his employee badge immediately.

With careful preparation and sensitive treatment, managers can sometimes succeed in softening the blow. "It's easier to be graceful now in dismissing a worker," notes Mary Lukas, vice president and employment

manager of the First Wisconsin Corporation. "Today people don't spend a working lifetime at one company."

"Firing may be bad news, but it can be done without antagonism and in a way that keeps the employee's dignity intact," says Paul Pagenkopf, vice president and general manager of Executive Assets Corporation, an outplacement firm with offices in six major cities. "I think it's possible to give a pink slip gracefully."

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