

Managers Communicating about Lay-offs

How to tell the employee, “Your job is being eliminated.”

Good communication is critical in the planning and implementation of layoffs. While the information you have to present is not pleasant, employees must hear it directly and honestly from management rather than from the rumor mill.

Telling employees they are going to be laid-off is not an easy task. You may experience anxiety and guilt about having to take the action. Recognize that these feelings are normal. Making sure that you treat the employee humanely and compassionately will help to make this situation more tolerable for both of you.

Preparation

1. Work with Employee and Labor Relations to develop a plan on how and when to communicate to management and the staff about impending lay-offs.
2. Discuss logistical considerations, such as last day of work and the return of keys, etc.
3. Remember that you are not personally responsible for the lay-off/reduction in time. If you feel the need, ASAP is available for consultation.
4. The employee may be upset or angry. He/she may blame you. Anticipate reactions so that you can be prepared to handle them in the best possible way.

Tips for Talking to the Employee

Do

- Speak to the employee in a private place
- Get right to the point
- Recognize the employee’s contribution to the unit and to the University
- Briefly explain the reasons for the lay-off
- Listen to the employee and wait for a response
- Describe the assistance available through Human Resource
- Explain the importance of understanding benefits and rehire status
- Give the employee the lay-off letter
- Clarify the separation date
- Offer support and an empathetic ear; listen without being defensive
- Schedule a later meeting to discuss logistics such as returning keys
- Be available to address the employee’s issues and concerns about the lay-off

Don't

- Engage in small talk
- Use humor
- Be apologetic
- Defend, justify or argue
- Threaten
- Identify others being laid off
- Try to minimize the situation
- Personalize the anger

Reactions to Expect from Remaining Employees

Reactions you might encounter from remaining employees after the layoff action include:

- Shock/Silence
- Anger/Blame
- Frustration
- Negative attitude
- Insecurity
- Resistance to change
- Unintentional sabotage by resisting organizational change

After the Layoff

Respond to the feelings of the remaining staff members and communicate a positive image for the future. A series of team meetings might ensure an ongoing safe place for communication.

Important topics include:

- Acknowledge that it is normal to feel anxious during these uncertain times.
- Explain the department reorganization and reorganization and redefine roles.
- Discuss any impact on workload/work flow.
- Assure staff members that no other positions will be affected at this time (if this is true) and that all employees are valued.
- Mention that ASAP services are available for any employees having difficulty with the changes.
- Maintain an open door policy so employees can come to you for guidance and support.

- Recognize that employees differ on how quickly they can adapt to change.
- Express optimism for the future.
- End on a positive note; remind staff members of their value and importance.

If you need assistance with the layoff process, please call ASAP to set up a Management Consultation appointment at (530) 752-2727 or e-mail Sharon Ree at slree@ucdavis.edu.

Typical Reactions To Job Loss

Here are some common reactions people might experience when they lose a job. Each person might react differently to his or her situation. The key is in how long the reactions last, how intense they are, and how much the person's daily functioning is impacted.

- Knowing the job is gone, but having difficulty believing it
- Loss of appetite, or increased appetite
- Feeling restless and looking for activity, and finding it difficult to concentrate on and complete tasks
- Trouble falling asleep, waking in the middle of the night, dreaming about the job or the job loss, or spending increased time sleeping
- Feeling exhausted and lacking energy
- Feeling depressed
- Buying things one would not normally buy
- Frequent changes in mood, sometimes over very small things
- Feeling embarrassed or guilty for what was done or not done (or said or not said) prior to losing the job. Preoccupied with "what if..."
- Being angry or irritated at the wrong person or the wrong circumstance or at the world in general
- Feeling angry towards those who made the decision or delivered the news of the layoff or termination
- Anxiety about job-hunting
- Not wanting to see former colleagues, friends, loved ones, or having difficulty initiating contact with others
- Crying unexpectedly

While being laid-off might cause personal, financial, and family stress, it might also serve as an opportunity to create change. Research shows that a significant percentage of employees laid-off are more satisfied in their next job positions. Many take the lay-off opportunity to rethink their career goals and choices.

Please consider contacting ASAP if you are having difficulty dealing with your current situation. ASAP is available during this transitional time to address issues such as family concerns about job loss, difficult emotional experiences, developing more effective coping skills, and referral to campus and community resources.

Academic and Staff Assistance Program (ASAP)

(530) 752-2727 or email Slree@ucdavis.edu