
The Mathis Group's

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Ten Laws for Managing Terminations

By Dr. Keith Mathis

Carrying out a termination is one of the hardest parts of managing people. Having solid guidelines to follow can help both the inexperienced supervisor and the seasoned professional. Being ready for whatever will potentially happen during the termination interview is a necessary evil in this day. Preparation is the key to stability in handling these situations effectively.

Meyers and Holusha offer a helpful statement on crisis. They point out,

Most organizations are reluctant to prepare for adversity. Leaders in any field find failure distasteful. It is difficult for them to admit that they or the organization had been guilty of poor performance. Every aggressive, successful person is conditioned to think success, plan for success, allow no negative thinking, associate with positive people, emphasize accomplishment and cast off losers (Meyers, G., Holusha, J., Managing Crisis, 1986, Unwin Paperbacks, p. 3).

In the next several issues of The Messenger, we will be focusing on terminations. You will find the following 10 laws to be of help in managing terminations and in reducing the trauma associated with each of them. This month we will emphasize the importance of privacy during a termination.



*Leaders show respect for people
by giving them time.
Mike Krzyzewski
Duke basketball coach*

1. All termination interviews should be conducted in private.

Privacy during a termination is critical. Find a private area where you will not be disturbed.

One of the most controversial and important policy matters is in the area of privacy. As concern focuses on such issues as drug testing, AIDS, lie detector tests, computer surveillance, and even genetic screening, many companies are delving further into employees' personal lives, and workers find themselves fighting harder for privacy rights (Stoner, J., & Freeman, R., Management, 1989, Prentice Hall, p. 338).

Privacy during the termination will reduce humiliation and counteract retaliation.

I have terminated people in a smoking area over lunch or even sitting on the front steps of the office. In each case, the employee and I were secluded at the time we were talking. The best location is a private office. Allowing employees to save face by being alone is a basic courtesy that reduces anxiety. This event is not a spectator sport.

Privacy helps to reinforce mutual respect.

Mutual respect is always needed, but it is especially important during a termination. Showing respect is an integral part of releasing the worker. In a termination, it is a way of giving emotional and psychological support. Supervisors should attempt to terminate in the most humane way possible. All humiliating tactics must be avoided. Termination in a calm, friendly way is best.

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Be careful about the tone of your voice.

A leader's tone of voice can sometimes sound harsh to his subordinates. This is accentuated when the speaker is frustrated or tense.

Voice tone can escalate the tension in a situation. It is not unusual to hear old-style managers scream at the employee and then utter out the dreadful statement, "You're fired!" This shows a lack of respect and a condescending attitude, and it can even promote workplace violence.

Give employees adequate time to talk and get their emotions under control before letting them leave.

The way the termination interview is conducted can increase or minimize the employee's emotional response. When conducting the termination interview, make sure the employee has had adequate time to hear and understand the disruptive behaviors that brought about this event.

If the termination comes as a surprise to an employee, several reasons may account for this. The most likely is that you probably did not work through the proper steps of coaching with the individual.

The session might take several hours to conduct or as little as twenty minutes. If the employee is extremely emotional, you need to help stabilize the situation before letting him or her leave.

Keep the number of people in attendance low.

Many termination interviews are held in a standard office with numerous administrative personnel as well as union employees in attendance. The interview might include the immediate supervisor as well as the Human Resource director or associate. In some cases, district managers, vice presidents of the department, or union representation may be asked to attend.

The number of people attending the interview should be kept to a minimum. One of the main reasons for this is to reduce the humiliation of the employee.

Remember your purpose is to terminate the employee. It is not to get back at him or her or tell the person off. You definitely do

not want to escalate a situation into a violent act by humiliation. You desire for the process to be legal but also humane.

Next month we will continue with the next laws for managing terminations.



Congratulations to our Marketing Director, Kim Tull, and her husband, Mike, on the birth of their son.

Noah Michael Tull
January 8, 2004
9 pounds 6 ounces
21 1/2 inches



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