
The Mathis Group's

Messenger

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Ten Laws for Managing Terminations

By Dr. Keith Mathis

This month we are continuing with laws six through eight on how to manage terminations. These laws will help ease the tension associated with terminations and assure that the proper guidelines were followed.

6. Keep the communication open by allowing the employee time to talk.

The employee should be allowed to talk. This is important for several reasons. By giving the employee time to talk speeds up the recovery time. This allows the worker to adjust in several ways.

They should be allowed to explain their side.

Open communication should be allowed so employees can discuss some of the things that upset them. This gives them an opportunity to explain their action and why their performance or behaviors did not change.

The employee might want to ask questions and seek answers that will help them in the future. Furthermore, unless you are willing to allow them to talk and explain themselves, you increase the potential that they will leave the company with hostile feelings. Hostile feelings increase the potential of retaliation. However, this does not mean you will take the termination away or give them another chance.

They could argue and make threats.

Some employees will argue with the person doing the exit interview. Arguing during the exit interview does not change the fact that the employee has exhibited wrong behavior or performance over an extended period. It is often better for a supervisor to allow them to vent without arguing with them. This prevents the situation from escalating. However, any major threat toward a person or the organization must be reported immediately.

They could cry and make you feel sorry.

Some employees cry and thereby attempt to manipulate the interviewer. One supervisor had an employee cry any time he

was being disciplined. Tears made the manager weak and caused him to back off. If tears can change the status of the termination interview, many employees will use them. Do not be surprised if the word spreads, and more and more workers use this as a ploy to get their way.

What should you do when someone starts to cry? In most cases, if someone begins to cry during any type of discipline, you should try to ignore it. Continue the process of explaining what behaviors or performance has brought this action about.

If the person is crying extremely hard, hand tissues to him or her as an act of kindness and continue the process. In some extreme cases, wait or pause the session for a few minutes to allow the employee to regain composure.

7. Request help if you anticipate a violent or hostile situation.

It is hard to anticipate all violent situations. Some will come out of a strong emotional reaction to the termination. Many of these can be anticipated by how the employee has responded to other confrontations.

Prepare even if the employee has never been hostile.

Requesting help during a termination should be standard if the employee has shown any type of violent or hostile behaviors. If the employee has ever acted violently in the past, anticipate that it might happen again in this situation.

At this time the employee will be more emotional, and his or her self-esteem will almost certainly be threatened. Under the stress of the situation, the person may make threats or even

(continued on page 2 Ten Laws for Managing Terminations)

Faultfinding without suggestions for improvement is a waste of time.

*Ralph C. Smedley
Founder of Toastmasters*

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(continued from page 1 *Ten Laws for Managing Terminations*)

attempt to do bodily harm. This would likely be directed at the one doing the exit interview or the supervisor who has submitted the discipline reports.

Take all threats seriously.

One supervisor asked, "How can I know the difference between those employees who are making ridiculous threats and those who will act on their threats?" It is hard to tell which employee will really carry out his or her threats.

People are most threatened by the possibility of losing control of their feelings, autonomy, power, and self-esteem. Such loss may result from change; rivalry with superiors, peers, or subordinates, increased responsibility; role ambiguity, and conflicting superiors. Anger often ensues in the forms of hostile withdrawal, irritability, or tension, becoming a 'workaholic' to expend feelings, channeling the anger into productive competition, or loss-induced destructive intra-organizational rivalry expressed as defensiveness, refusal to communicate, guarding of territory, and fighting. At times, anger is staged to manipulate others or is displaced onto innocent, helpless substitute targets in scapegoating (Bittel, L., & Ramsey, J., 1985, Handbook for Professional Managers, p. 380).

We must take all threats as if they are real and could be carried out. If employees state they will get us back or they know where we live, they are making a threat that could be carried out. Don't pass this off as unimportant, insignificant, or unlikely. Threats should be documented and reported to security and to the police.

Maintain focus so you reduce hostility.

With proper preparation, expect the termination to go smoothly, but stay focused and don't chase rabbits. Many workers will bring up other issues or other people to take the spotlight off themselves. Don't be caught off guard. Expect the unexpected. Have help available!

8. Do not terminate anyone through e-mail, over the phone, or in any impersonal manner.

As we previously noted, terminations are one of the hardest responsibilities a person in management must discharge. Because of this, many supervisors have resorted to impersonal

means such as notifying the person through a letter, memo, or e-mail.


Impersonal methods for disciplining and terminating are not humane.

When supervisors use letters or e-mail to terminate a worker, they probably do not give a full explanation of the reasons for the dismissal, and they do not allow the employee to ask questions. This impersonal method frustrates the person and increases the potential for retaliation. The employee is robbed of his or her chance to face the accusation.

You can document what you have said personally in a letter for the employee to keep.

A letter of termination is very appropriate for finalizing the process. Make sure if you give a letter, you thoroughly document all incidents leading to the termination. Never send the document without personally talking with the employee. Always follow proper procedures.





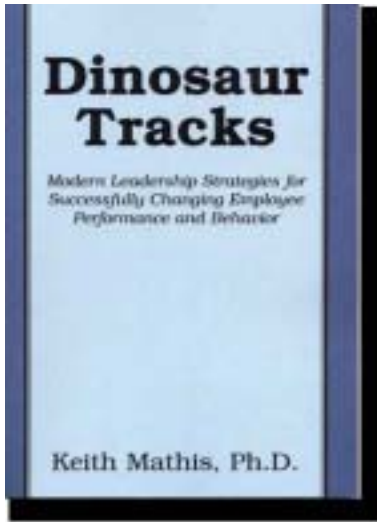
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Dr. Keith Mathis is founder of The Mathis Group, a training and consulting company based in St. Louis, Missouri. Keith also serves as an adjunct professor of business/management with Nova Southeastern University in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. Keith is a member of the National Speakers' Association, American Society of Training and Development, and the World Futurists' Society. Keith holds a Bachelors in Behavioral Science, a Masters in Management, and a Ph.D. in Administration Management with a specialty in Organizational Behavior and Development.

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