
Preparing for Employee Notification Meetings

Corporate downsizing, restructuring and organizational changes are part of our ever changing workplace. Along with these changes come the difficult decisions that impact employees' work status. Should you decide that you need to let an employee go – whether for cause or not for cause - the following outlines a process to help you prepare for a notification meeting and deliver the termination message in a way that is respectful and effective.

Timing & Location

The best time to hold a notification meeting is towards the end of the work day so as to do it with discretion, provide privacy and allow the employee to leave with a sense of dignity. If possible, arrange for employees who share the same work space to leave early, so the employee can go back to their desk and collect their belongings in private.

If you need to schedule this meeting during the work day – consider an offsite location, or conduct the meeting in a private, discreet room in another part of the building – away from the employee's work team. Do not use your office, but rather a more neutral meeting room.

The Role of Your Career Transition Consultant

Your Career Transition Consultant can help you prepare to deliver the termination message in a way that is direct, professional and respectful of the employee. We also provide vital support for the employee after they have been presented with the termination news. Our role is to counsel them through the emotional news, assure them they have the support of a highly qualified career consultant who is dedicated to supporting them in their job search, and provide support to help them exit the premises with dignity and professionalism.

Our role can also be to collect security cards, parking passes, credit cards, mobile phones, laptops and other organization materials that the employee might have in their possession.

Post notification meeting, the Career Transition Consultant will follow up with the employee – usually within 2-4 hours (depending on the employee's needs) to provide additional counsel and support, as well to book a meeting date to launch the employee's career transition program.

Manager's Notification Meeting Script

The day before the meeting, set time with your HR Representative to craft your notification meeting script. It should be short, concise and to the point. Your meeting should be **10-15 minutes maximum** as your objective is to deliver the message, listen to any feedback the employee might have, have yourself or your HR Representative discuss the details of the severance package, and then introduce the Career Transition Consultant. Keep your conversation sincere, direct and concise. Avoid small talk as it confuses the employee as to the purpose for the meeting.

It is key to remember that the purpose of this meeting is not to explain or defend your decision, nor is it to conduct a performance appraisal. It is to simply notify the employee that as of today, their employment with your organization has ended.

Should you be tempted to go into detail, be aware that your comments and explanations are often not well received by the employee. They could become defensive, perhaps argumentative resulting in a very negative and toxic meeting. Instead, focus in and listen to the employee, then restate that the decision is final.

Manager Notification Meeting Scripts:

Option 1: *(Employee name)*, please sit down. We are meeting as a difficult decision has been made. Your employment with *(name of organization)* has ended today. *(Option to add reason: We have restructured and eliminated your role and do not have another role for you in the organization.)* To assist you in your job search we have engaged the services of a career transition firm. I know this is very difficult news. Is everything I have said clear to you? *(HR name)* would now like to review with you the next steps and resources available to you. *(After HR speaks)* Thank you *(use the employee's name)* for your contribution to our organization. I wish you all the best. *(Manager leaves the room to notify the Career Transition Consultant the meeting has ended. The Consultant will enter the room and HR will leave).*

Option 2: *(Employee name)*, please sit down. I have a difficult message to give you. We appreciate your years of service but as of today your employment with us is terminated. We have a severance package for you and career transition coaching to help you secure new employment. *(HR name)* would now like to review your package and introduce you to your career consultant who is standing by. *(After HR speaks)* Thank you again for your contribution to our organization. I wish you the best. *(Manager leaves the room to notify the Career Transition Consultant the meeting has ended. The Consultant will then enter the room and HR will leave).*

Strategies for Dealing with Potential Employee Emotional Reactions

For many employees this information will come as a shock – although others may remain calm and collected, or even appear elated as they had wanted to shift jobs but just couldn't do it on their own. The following are strategies to help you address the employee's reaction to the notification news:

Reaction: "Why me?"

Strategy: "This has been a difficult decision but it is final."

Reaction: Bargaining – "I can work harder." or "I am willing to move to another department."

Strategy: You can empathize that you understand their commitment to the organization, but the decision is final.

Reaction: Anger.

Strategy: The best option is to let the employee vent. Do not defend your decision or interrupt the employee. Instead, focus in and listen. If they continue to be angry, state: "I understand you are angry. Let me introduce *(name of the Career Transition Consultant)*, your Career Transition Consultant who is here to support you and help you find new employment."

Reaction:	"Is this about my performance?"
Strategy:	If this is not due to a performance issue but rather a corporate restructuring, let them know that the restructuring has impacted their job. If this is due to a performance issue, this is not the time or place to go into details. Your response could be: "This has been a difficult decision but it is final. If you would like to discuss this further I would be open to meeting with you at a later date. For today we would like to show you your severance package and introduce your Career Transition Consultant."
Reaction:	Crying.
Strategy:	Be sensitive and offer them a tissue. Give them time to collect themselves before proceeding. Should the crying continue, you might state: "I can see you are deeply impacted by this news. Let me introduce (name of Career Transition Consultant), your Career Transition Consultant, who is here to support you and help you find new employment."
Reaction:	No reaction or discussion.
Strategy:	Do not probe. Maintain respect for the manner in which the employee is processing the news. Transition the conversation to your HR Representative who will review the severance package. Then introduce the Career Transition Consultant who will counsel the employee and discuss how they are coping with the news.

Keeping Your Composure

These meetings are challenging as you are delivering difficult news. When notification meetings go sideways, usually one of two things happen: the employee negatively reacts which we've addressed above, or the manager does not keep their composure.

Avoid losing your cool or becoming unnerved:

- Practice your script the night before. Know what you need to say and don't deviate. Keep your script on hand during your meeting to refer to.
- Do something energetic before heading into the meeting: a brisk walk to clear your head, a quick jog at lunch, or run a flight of stairs. This shift in energy will help you keep your mind sharp and clearly focused on conducting an effective meeting. It also allows you to project a calm, poised yet personable perspective.
- If you feel you are getting emotional, remember this is hard on you but much harder on the employee.
- Breathe! Your emotional reaction is triggering a fight or flight response. Fight = aggressively defending your decision, or battling out performance issues that should have been discussed long before you decided you needed to let this person go. Flight = apologizing and being overly emotional, or being dismissive and disrespectful as you just want the meeting to end. Instead, break your fight or flight response by taking a deep breath before responding.
- **Focus in and listen.** Not only does this get you off the hot seat, but it is respectful to show the employee you are present and open to hearing what they have to say. You don't need to agree or disagree with them. **The power is in listening versus reacting.**

Informing the Employee's Work Team & Clients

Mitigate office rumours and negative backlash by speaking directly with the employee's work team either immediately after the notification meeting while the employee is meeting with the Career Transition Consultant, or first thing the next morning. Let the team know that a difficult decision has been made and that the employee is no longer working with your organization. To ease concerns, state that you are not expecting further changes. Then thank all of them for their contribution to the current initiative or projects that the team is working on. Offer that if they have any concerns or questions, they can drop by your office and outline when you will be available. Your Career Transition Consultant can help you devise a strategy and plan for these meetings.

Post notification meeting, whether by email or phone call, inform key stakeholders (internal and external clients, etc.) of the fact that the employee is no longer with the organization. Proactively advise them that all correspondence/projects/issues are to be directed to (name of new contact, phone and email address). Immediately following the notification meeting ensure the employee's email and phone line is forwarded to the new contact.

In Summary

- Practice your script
- Breathe!
- Be sincere, direct and concise
- Target 10 – 15 minutes maximum
- Avoid talking too much, instead focus on listening
- Don't go into detail
- Transition the meeting to the Career Transition Consultant who is trained to provide emotional support and will help the employee leave the premises with dignity and respect

At JL Careers our Career Transition Consultants have the expertise to help you navigate potential notification meeting minefields and facilitate a smooth, respectful departure. From on-site support through to providing leading-edge job search strategies, we offer customized solutions to provide a positive and effective career transition experience for your exiting employee. We look forward to supporting you and your employees at your next notification meeting.