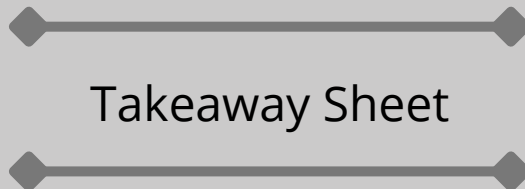# Forbes

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How Could We Infuse More Consideration into the Termination Process?

Takeaway Sheet

An Employee Empowerment Group
Mastermind

Forbes Business Council

Jocelyne Morin-Nurse
CEO
Loxentus Inc.
Employee Empowerment Member Leader

Thank you for your valuable insight!

- Loubna Noureddin, Co-Founder and CEO, Mind Market Consultants
- Roxanne Derhodge, CEO, Roxanne Derhodge Consulting
- Mark Sirkin, PhD, Sirkin Advisors
- Andrew Kovalev, Managing partner, BusinessInvitee Consulting Group
- Jazmine Wilkes, Human Resources Generalist, LaunchTech, LLC
- Patrick Grimes, Founding CEO , Invest on Main Street

Please note that only the participants who agreed to be named are listed above.

Key Takeaways

Terminating an employee – with or without cause – is tough. It's difficult on the person being let go, the person informing those being let go, and the team as a whole. What lessons have we learned that could help others facing this unfortunate situation?

How/when do you tell the remaining team members that someone was let go?

- Usually, the team knows. Employees talk all the time. And if leaders are not transparent with them, they'll start making up their own stories. They may start gossiping.
- It's important to protect the terminated person's dignity. When officially informing the team, make sure to also highlight the good things that this person has done.
  - In terms of escalation, it usually follows the sequence of: verbal warning, written warning, and then performance improvement plan. And if there are significant potentially legal issues, consult with an expert such as an employment lawyer.
- Explain to the team why the decision to terminate this person was made. Of course using the appropriate level of discretion depending on the situation, but be as transparent as possible. Especially if the decision was made by a small group at a higher-up level such as the executives. A termination without context can be a very scary situation for the team.
  - To help the remaining team members understand better and calm that "am I next" fear, make sure the "rules" are clear. If a person could be terminated due to performance, for example for not meeting the agreed-upon KPIs for several quarters in a row, be transparent about this.
  - Also be transparent about the company's situation. About what is going on within the organization. Is there a risk of bankruptcy? Find the right way to explain where things stand.
- If it's a small team, tell everyone immediately. If it's a large team, share with those who need to know.

Key Takeaways

How do you protect yourself emotionally as a leader?

- If the company decided to terminate someone, its leadership usually had a valid reason for doing so. If it was just an emotional decision on the part of a manager, it may be time to reevaluate that manager.
    - And if the organization was clear on what could lead to termination, the team members are also already aware of the risks of such behavior.
- Keep in mind the reason why this person is being terminated:
    - If the team member violated the contract or has demonstrated integrity issues, they need to be terminated.
    - If it's poor performance, assuming you've already given that person a performance improvement plan to follow and then they don't improve, this can only go so long.
- Think about the impact on the rest of the team. Other team members are likely aware of how this person has been performing from working with them. If they are allowed to continue on too long with no improvement, it impacts the team negatively.
    - Unaddressed, that negative behavior can also spread to other team members.
- Realize that by letting them go, this may make the underperforming individual recognize that they need to put more effort into their work if they want to remain employed at any organization.
- Consider that they may be a better fit at another organization and be successful there. This is not a judgement on the individual as a person but rather a question of situation and fit within the organization.

Key Takeaways

Who should be doing the actual terminating?

- For some, the manager/supervisor should lead the termination. The HR manager could also be there as a backup if the person being let go has any questions about their benefits or especially if the relationship was contentious and there is a risk of volatility.
    - As well as HR needing to know, it's important to inform IT (as they will need to cut off accesses and potentially prevent any extra sharing).
    - It's not that they would necessarily be vindictive but they may be receiving information they don't need to have.
- Some may feel it as more respectful coming from their direct manager.
- But does the manager/supervisor have the skills to do this? This person was hired for a specific role that may not include having the skillset required to terminate someone. For example, they may lean too heavily into emotion as oppose to accountability and keep someone longer.
- Ideally, the termination would be handled in such a manner that the person being let go does not end up hating the organization. This requires finesse.
- As executives, we must ask ourselves what is in the best interest of both the person being let go and the organization to determine who should be actually terminating the individual.
- Leaders also need to weigh this against the desire to help that leader grow and become more well-rounded.
- Just because someone is good at holding team members accountable, it does not necessarily mean they would be good at terminating people.

Key Takeaways

How can we teach leaders to gain the skills required to effectively terminate someone?

- It's important to teach leaders to have difficult conversations. To be able to lead effectively, they need to be able to have difficult conversations.
  - Although it is a special skillset, today, leaders are expected to be able to have a variety of conversations including very nuanced ones.
- The organization could provide its leaders with:
  - Private coaching,
  - Guidance by walking them through such a scenario.
- The organization could set up processes in such a manner that its leaders have access to support during the termination.
  - It's important to think of the team as a whole and how team members can complement each other. Maybe that means having two individuals there. That could also help negate the perception that the termination is personal.
- Educate the leaders about the potential shaming in the process.
  - Give people time to say goodbye.
  - The way leaders terminate them will impact on how employees and former employees talk about the organization in the community.
  - Terminating someone with some sense of grace and feeling is not only the human thing to do, it's also a good business practice.
- Highlight to leadership that showing that the organization is terminating with respect will impact the remaining team members positively and may even increase buy-in.
- Explore providing a form of debrief via an EAP-type service both for those being let go and for those doing the letting go. There are many specialized consultants that could come in for a day and help with that. It would also be a concrete gesture showing that the organization cares. Those remaining are watching.
- When downsizing, ensure there is support for all. Even for those remaining, without proper support, it may be difficult to simply go back to being productive. Allay people's fears through facts.

Key Takeaways

What should you be considering if you need to terminate someone in a virtual situation?

- Ensure you have a sufficient time buffer before and after the meeting.
- Ensure those who need to know have been advised in advance, including having the remote shutoff of equipment and subscriptions scheduled.
- Use a unique Zoom link to avoid an awkward intrusion.
- Use your own, uniquely-generated for this meeting, Zoom link to ensure no one else will be pinging you about the link being in use.
- Ask to have the meeting on camera to read body language as best as possible.
- Ask if they're in a place where they can talk privately. If not, ask them to find such a place.
- Resist the urge to fill the silences. Become comfortable with the silences to give the employee being terminated the chance to say what they have to say.
  - Leaning into the silences also, in a way, almost lets them determine when they're ready to go.
- Turn off notifications. This is the time to be entirely focused on this individual.
- Beware of how it's titled in the calendar invitation to protect their privacy.
- Although it's somewhat of a different skillset to terminate someone remotely, at its core it's still very similar to doing this in person.

We hope that today's session gave you a sense of how, with a few tweaks and mindset shifts, leaders are able to infuse a bit more grace into the termination process, helping those being terminated, the team members remaining, and the leaders themselves.

And if you haven't watched the replay yet, make sure to do so, there's a lot more valuable information in there!

Notes

Use this section to capture ideas as you're watching the session

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Next Steps

What are some next steps that you will be taking as a result of the information you've heard today?

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Remember that...

> **"**
> "Effective leadership is putting first things first. Effective management is discipline, carrying it out."
> **"**

— Stephen Covey

Thank you for being part of this important community.

Let's continue the conversation in the Employee Empowerment room!