

Bad Budget Times: Preparing Yourself, and Your Organization, for Potential Layoffs

Now that we're all entering bad budget times, it's likely that many managers will be asked to perform the necessary but stressful & emotional task of restructuring or down-sizing staff.

This collection of resources captures quotes, remarks, and references from those who have personally experienced this task.

This simply tears one's core and takes something from your soul every single time.

I have, unfortunately, had to do layoffs and terminations too many times...it never gets easier, no matter how often you do it. In fact, I'd be wary of the person who did find this easy.

It's the worst thing you can do, but it may be absolutely essential for the institution (and sometimes it ends up being the best for the individual).

Take Care of Your Organization

Consider all alternatives.

- Are there other creative ways to save money? Are any other flexible work arrangements possible?
- Are you sure you have considered every possible creative budget option before recommending layoffs?
- Is it possible to offer early retirement packages?
- Have you weighed each alternative to make sure you'll really save money in the long run?
- Can you offer priority re-assignments? (Be sure to think about the ramifications of doing so...reassigning someone whose skills are questionable could be a bad move politically.)
- Get advice on whether any of your alternatives could be considered discrimination!

Be fair to all involved while still balancing your budget.

- Be as transparent as possible.
- Tell them the truth as soon as you know it.
- Get the facts out quickly & directly.
- Let people know you care about them.
- Communicate how the extra work will be handled.

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Take Care of the Affected Individuals

Be humane.

Don't operate in a vacuum.

- Collaborate with central HR (especially helpful if you can have a liaison assigned).
- Get Unions (if any) on board.

Develop a communication plan.

- Be no-nonsense, but still compassionate. Allow the individual to leave your organization with their dignity intact.
- Work with an HR person to develop a relationship/strategy.
 - Ask for the creation of a packet for laid-off employees that covers topics such as: unemployment benefits, insurance issues, counseling services, career counseling & placement opportunities, perhaps even help with updating resumes.
 - Prepare for the specific circumstances of the affected individual who will be laid off and prepare possible alternatives, preferably based on their formally (or informally) identified strengths.
- Make sure all the details are known and worked out.
 - Don't give someone their notice, but not be able to tell them when their last day will be, what severance package they will receive, or other pertinent facts.
- Carefully orchestrate the face-to-face meeting.
 - Include the direct supervisor and an HR person in the meeting. Always have someone else in the room with you.
 - Ask central HR for a script to use.
 - Bottom Line: *I'm sorry to inform you that your position is being eliminated effective immediately.*
 - Understanding: *I understand this comes as a shock to you.*
 - Assistance: *Here's what we can do to help you transition.*
 - Give some time after delivering the bottom-line for the person to gather thoughts/emotions
 - Common reactions are shock/anger, but sometimes no immediate reaction
 - Be prepared for them to cry
 - Have a counselor from HR available to talk with them immediately if needed
 - Walk them out the door (unless other longer-term arrangements have been made)
- Control the message by telling the rest of the department's staff at the same time the bottom-line is being delivered to the affected individual.
 - If multiple people will be notified on the same day, plan the location & people-flow carefully. Be aware of (and prepared for!) the impact of having affected vs. non-affected individuals in the same room.
 - Be prepared to answer questions you can't answer. *"That's an issue between Sally and her supervisor and not something I can share."*
- Immediately after, send a note to all staff alerting them of the facts. Make sure that HR reviews the note with plenty of time to make changes.
- Consider role-playing before the big day.

Take Care of Yourself

As the creator of emotional turmoil for other people, you must develop a support network.

- Identify a small group of on- or off-campus colleagues whom you can talk to.
- Don't rely on (or ask) people who report to you to be part of your support network.
- The higher up you are, the more likely your network will be external to your organization.

Remember you have an obligation to the institution that hired you to do a job.

- Understand the turmoil you're causing, but don't let emotions drive your decisions.

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Look at Other Resources

How to Tell Someone They're Being Laid Off

<http://www.dahlstromco.com/store/pc/viewContent.asp?idpage=4>

Surviving a Layoff

<http://www.dahlstromco.com/store/pc/viewPrd.asp?idproduct=3>

Downsizing and Layoff Strategies

http://humanresources.about.com/od/layoffsdownsizing/Downsizing_and_Layoff_Strategies.htm

Responsible Restructuring: Creative and Profitable Alternatives to Layoffs

<http://www.amazon.com/Responsible-Restructuring-Creative-Profitable-Alternatives/dp/1576751295>

Avoiding, Implementing, and Surviving Staff Layoffs: Information for Employees and Departments (University of California, Berkeley)

<http://hrweb.berkeley.edu/layoff/contents.htm#toc>

Resources for Employees (Kansas Department of Administration)

<http://www.da.ks.gov/ps/subject/arc/layoff/employeeeresources.htm>

Layoff Information Packet for Managers (University of California, Santa Barbara)

<http://hr.ucsb.edu/employment/pdf/Layoff%20Info%20packet%20for%20managers.pdf>

Employee Layoffs – Information for Deans/Managers (Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey)

<http://uhr.rutgers.edu/lr/LayoffInformation.htm>

StrengthsFinder 2.0

<http://www.strengthsfinder.com>

Now, Discover Your Strengths

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0743201140/bookstorenow57-20>

The Speed of Trust

<http://www.speedoftrust.com/>

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