

How to effectively communicate with employees during a layoff: a checklist

Developing effective communication during a layoff is fraught with challenges and pitfalls. Many communicators quickly become overwhelmed, wondering:

- Where do I start?
- Who should I contact to get the right information?
- What's the most appropriate order of events?
- How can I ensure we treat employees with empathy and honesty?
- How can we retain employee pride after the layoffs?

The best way to deal with this level of complexity is to get organized. **Use this checklist as a step-by-step process for managing your efforts.** That way, you'll get ahead of difficult situations and steer the organization through this trying time.

Partner with key teams

First, get in touch with your colleagues who are coordinating layoffs or have an important stake in the process.

Here's what to do:

- Identify** key stakeholders, such as HR, legal, affected business unit leaders, IT and facilities.
- Join the task force** assigned to manage layoffs. If there isn't a task force, set up a weekly or daily meeting with all key stakeholders.
- Work with stakeholders** to understand every detail of the plan. Ask lots of questions, including:
 - Is there a coordinated plan to handle all layoffs on the same day? If not, how will we manage employee anxiety as each new wave is announced?
 - Do we need to inform unions, works councils, local governments or other parties?
- Assign** responsibilities for important activities, such as:
 - Who will plan the timeline for the day of layoffs?



Develop a detailed communication plan

Once you've collected the details, it's time to create a comprehensive communication plan. Be sure to consider three phases: before, during and after the layoff announcement.

Here's what to include:

- Situation:** Describe what's happening and why, including any context that should be considered when delivering communication.
- Audience analysis:** Note characteristics about each audience group that may affect how you communicate with that group. For example, if all employees being let go work in one location, your tactics and timeline will be different than if all work remotely.
- Objectives:** Determine what you want employees to know, believe and do as a result of your communication. Here are some **examples:**
- Strategies:** These are the methods you'll use to achieve your objectives. Consider how the following **topics** can be used to achieve your objectives.
- Tactics:** Employ a mix of tactics to ensure you are able to reach all employees. See more below.
- Timeline:** Create a detailed timeline of events before, during and after the layoffs. Points to consider:
 - Think about who needs to know what information first. You'll want affected employees to learn the news in person first before hearing rumors.
 - Don't forget to inform teams that their valued colleagues have been let go. These folks will be wondering if their jobs are on the line, so your announcement will both provide them relief and inform them of the tough news.

- Know**
- *Employees being separated:* What resources are available to them, what steps to take and who to contact before their last day of employment
 - *Remaining employees:* Department priorities for moving forward, including how any lost job roles will be covered
- Believe**
- *All:* The organization is treating all employees with respect and care
 - *All:* This was a difficult decision to make, but critical for the future success of the organization
- Do**
- *Remaining employees:* Participate in department discussions about the layoffs and future business plans

Topic	Sample strategy
Vehicles	Conduct all layoff conversations in person or face-to-face virtually
Leaders	Prepare leaders with tools to communicate clearly and with empathy
Managers	Equip managers with tools to hold difficult conversations and motivate remaining team members
Key messages	Develop clear, succinct and consistent messaging
Two-way participation	Provide opportunities for employees to ask questions and voice concerns
Measurement	Measure communication efforts and use findings to influence future communication

Create empathetic, honest messages

Developing the right messages to communicate a layoff is especially difficult. You need to balance clarity with empathy—get to the point but also write and speak conversationally.



Here's how:

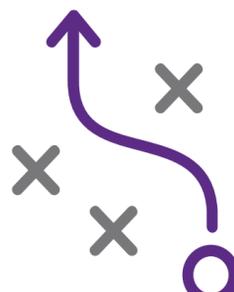
- Don't** bury the news behind context; get right to the point.
- Don't** sandwich the bad news between good news—you risk confusing the employee.
- Don't** sugarcoat the news with empty phrases like, "Don't worry" or "It's not so bad."
- Don't** use corporate speak. Complicated words or phrases make employees feel like you're hiding something.
- Do** treat employees like adults.
- Do** show you care by acknowledging that this is a tough situation. Try this: "I know this is difficult news. How are you feeling right now?"

Coach leaders and managers to communicate with dignity and authority

It's one thing for you to draft effective messages. It's a whole other ball game to help leaders and managers use those messages well.

Here's how to help them deliver a consistent story:

- Develop** a communication toolkit that includes:
 - The leader's or manager's role in communicating
 - Key messages explaining what's happening and why
 - Frequently asked questions
 - Scripts to coach leaders and managers on what to say
- Schedule** a prep meeting for all senior leaders. Cover the timeline of events and leaders' responsibilities, share the toolkit and provide an opportunity to share concerns.
- Ask** each department head to hold similar meetings with people managers who will be handling layoffs.



Use the right communication tactic for each message

In any sensitive situation, it's important to deliver the news in the most appropriate way.

Here's how:

- Hold** large group meetings to announce the change. Decide whether this is best done before or after individual meetings.
- Schedule** one-on-one conversations to communicate each layoff.
- Develop** information packets for affected employees.
- Hold** staff meetings to inform teams about any layoffs.
- Send** an all-staff email to update employees after the layoffs have been completed.
 - **Tip:** Create a video of the CEO to demonstrate leadership.
- Schedule** a company-wide Q&A session two weeks later to give staff a chance to share opinions.



Measure communication effectiveness

Conduct research to determine if your communication is effective or if any changes are needed.

Here's how:

- Hold** interviews with affected employees to learn whether they have all the information they need and feel they were treated respectfully.
- Conduct** focus groups with remaining employees to gauge their attitudes and understanding of where the organization is headed.
- Survey** remaining employees one month after the event to measure any changes in attitude or knowledge.

