

Best Practices for Laying Off Remote Employees



As a Human Resources Professional or Business Leader, you may have experience notifying employees of a layoff, but now you may find yourself in the position of needing to communicate the difficult message to employees who are working from home. This can be a highly sensitive situation and there are things that you can do to minimize the adverse impact and allow employees to maintain their dignity. While the preferred method is always an in-person message, certain situations may not permit this to happen.

There are a number of approaches to consider, whether it be large group, small group, or individual notifications. In this article, we offer recommendations and suggested best practices designed to help the organization manage the logistics of remote notifications, which may be modified based upon your unique company culture. *This is not intended to be legal advice. Seek legal counsel to be certain you are in compliance with legal requirements.*

Individual Notifications

Notifying employees individually is always the ideal scenario. It provides privacy for the employee as they hear, process, and respond to the message received. This also allows the employer the opportunity to address specific questions the employee may have.

- Schedule the meeting in advance with the employee; this should not be a spontaneous exercise. Advise the employee that the meeting topic is confidential and sensitive. Since individuals are working from home, this will give them the ability to find a private space away from family and other distractions.
- If the manager and employee are accustomed to communicating through a virtual video conferencing platform, that form of communication may be very appropriate; otherwise, we recommend a conference call conducted by phone. Conference calls will afford the employee a measure of privacy as they react to the news. Your organizational culture and situation should influence your decision.
- Meetings should include an HR representative as well as the line manager. We recommend a scripted approach about transition specifics, such as continued access to company email and return of company equipment.
- The separation packet should be prepared in advance and referenced during the meeting. This packet should be delivered within 24 hours of notification. We do not recommend sending the packet in advance, in the event the meeting does not take place when scheduled.
- It is essential that, during the meeting, points of contact for separation related questions such as COBRA, severance, unemployment, other extended benefits, etc. must be provided and also highlighted in the separation packet.

Group Notifications

When large numbers of employees (generally 35 or more) need to be notified simultaneously, a form of mass communication will likely be your best option. The first step may be a global notification followed by smaller groups of 10 to 15 so that individuals may have the opportunity for discussion and questions. Conducting these smaller group meetings via virtual video conference platform will be both expedient as well as more personalized.

- When scheduling the meeting, advise the employees that the nature of the meeting is confidential and sensitive. This will allow the employee who is working from home the option to engage in the meeting in a private location.
- Small group meetings should include an HR representative as well as line managers. We recommend a scripted approach that includes detailed information about transition specifics, such as access to company email and return of company equipment.
- Separation packets for each employee should be prepared in advance and referenced during the meeting. This information should be delivered within 24 hours of notification. We do not recommend sending the packet in advance, in case an employee does not attend the meeting. *Be sure your virtual video conference platform allows you to track attendance and you know how to access this information during or after the meeting.*
- It is essential that, during the meeting, points of contact for separation related questions such as COBRA, severance, unemployment, and other extended benefits are provided and also highlighted in the separation packet.

Losing a job is one of life's top 10 stressors. Therefore, it is essential that the availability of EAP be emphasized both during the notification meeting and clearly highlighted in the separation packet.

Following notifications, HR and managers should convene to debrief and coordinate advising survivors of the layoffs. This will not only minimize stress but will also protect employee morale.



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