

Handling redundancy: how to bring compassion into the process

Being made redundant is exhausting, depressing and negative for all involved, so there's little surprise it ranks as one of life's most stressful experiences.

No doubt, as an employer, you've explored all the other options available, including furlough, reducing working hours, job rotation, career breaks etc., but there's no getting away from it: making redundancies is the only option left.

There's no denying it's a daunting prospect. No one wants to have "that" conversation, and it isn't going to be a pleasant experience for anyone. However, handling it in the right way can make a significant difference to how people cope and react, not to mention the effects on your company's reputation, its future success, and the morale of those left behind.

The aim of the redundancy process is to ensure those being made redundant are left feeling as positive as possible emotionally, and that they're well-equipped to deal with the challenges that lie ahead.

Research by Stanford University found that employees are far less likely to raise disputes, wrongful termination claims, or become disruptive if they believe the process has been handled compassionately.

So it's definitely worth putting some time and effort into doing the right thing, safeguarding your employees' wellbeing and ultimately the reputation of your business.

But how do you go about it?

We've put together a simple plan for handling the process compassionately, that will benefit both you and your employees:

- Communicate with care throughout the whole process, to reduce anxiety and uncertainty
- Ensure you break the news first, as early as possible, so people don't hear it via the grapevine
- Make your communications and messages crystal clear and consistent, using empathetic and sincere language to show how much you care
- Include specific details of timescales and logistics
- Be as transparent as possible about what's happening and why, what you've done to avoid the current situation and how you've made it as fair as you can
- If you're not conveying the message, make sure those who are fully understand the situation, are capable of holding difficult conversations and can handle feedback
- Don't sugar-coat it: your employees are adults so treat them as such, with respect and empathy
- Make sure you recognise and value the contributions your employees have made to your organisation, so they understand it's the positions being made redundant, not the people.

As an employer, you need to:

- be approachable, listen and act
- take time to understand individuals' personal circumstances, challenges and aspirations
- allow time for people to process information before asking for their feedback
- consider all ideas and suggestions presented to you

- ensure confidential conversations remain just that
- be flexible and prepared to change plans if something comes up that you haven't considered before.

To support those being made redundant:

- Make sure they fully understand their rights and options, and that there are open channels available for discussing them when they wish
- Use some resources to provide virtual workshops, career support, 1:1s and feedback on where they could improve and consider bringing in external experts and organisations where appropriate (our event panellists would be a good place to start)
- Extend the availability of employee assistance programmes, counselling services and other relevant tools
- Put together a support pack offering practical help such as CV writing, interviewing skills, useful contacts etc. (use our downloadable toolkit as a starting point)
- Do as much as you can to help people redeploy, start thinking about their transferrable skills and be open to options they may not have considered
- Think about what tools you could use for optional, ongoing communication.

And to support those being left behind:

- Make sure leaders at all levels remain positive, visible and approachable
- Work out a plan to restore their confidence, rebuild moral and resolve any fears about the future

- Keep communicating with them, updating them on progress and rebuilding their confidence
- Involve them in your plans for building the future
- Help them deal with the emotional effects of losing beloved and valued colleagues and any changes new ways of working will bring, reminding them of the availability of any employee assistance programmes if they need them.

As a final checkpoint, ask yourself:

- Are the people you're letting go feeling as emotionally positive as possible and well-equipped for upcoming challenges?
- Do you feel you've done as much to support people as you can?
- Will people feel you've been fair, compassionate, transparent and responsible?

If you feel you'd like to do more, or that you need support in doing what you can, contact the Focus from the Outset team and find out how we can help your employees explore personal development, enterprise training, returning to work, retraining, registering as self-employed, or signposting to other support projects and organisations.

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