

WHEN YOU HAVE TO SAY, “YOU’RE FIRED”

Firing someone can seem heartless at times, but in actuality, continuing to employ people who routinely fail is a disservice to them as well as your organization.

Constant failure breeds more disappointment and rubs off on everyone else. You can't let a non-performing employee's attitude or actions infect the rest of your team. The other members of your team notice when you give a pass to someone else. They will start to question your ability to make decisions. They will resent you for relying on them to pick up the slack. Non-performers will infect other members of your team. They will impact other departments and can potentially leave you without a job. Just remember that you are responsible for your employees, and if they are failing, so will you.

Give advanced warning. In some cases, it's necessary (perhaps because of company policies) and or desirable to let someone know well in advance that the writing's on the wall and that they'll be terminated if they don't make needed improvements. Unless the performance/behavior at issue is especially offensive—sexual harassment, for instance, is grounds for immediate termination—sometimes the employee can realize the error of their ways and turn things around.

You can set up an initial meeting to lay out the fact that things aren't looking good for them, and to let them know the situation can be turned around with some measurable goals being met within a certain timeframe, generally 30-90 days. There is a standard action plan for this called a performance improvement plan. Once the probation period is up, if the employee still isn't up to snuff, they know what's coming, and are fired. This also gives the employee the chance to resign and exit gracefully themselves within that timeframe should they choose to. When this type of performance plan is put in place, it's common for that to happen.

The phrase “I should have fired them a long time ago” should not be uttered from your lips. Just do it as soon as a decision has been made.

Firing an employee will be awkward and uncomfortable no matter what, but there are a few things you can keep in mind to make it a little less painful for everyone involved. You also want to protect your legal and financial interests, which can easily be forgotten in this process. Below you'll find tips to think about that will help guide you through the process:

1. **Get to it swiftly**—act quickly once the decision is made, it's better for everyone involved.
2. **Tell them the truth**—this isn't a time for idle chitchat. Get right down to business.
3. **Say they are “terminated”**—It's as simple as “I have some bad news for you. Today is your last day here.” Then state the reason for termination in one simple sentence. It seems cold and impersonal, but frankly, it needs to be.
4. **Explain the details of leaving**—i.e. benefits, IT security, company property etc.
5. **Offer to help**—pass along a job lead for something he or she is better suited to do.
6. **Be prepared for anger**—Give them as much understanding as possible. There are studies that show that people who are told why it's necessary to let them go are less stressed about it.
7. **Keep it professional**—try firing at the end of the day once some employees have left.
8. **Don't take it personally**—If you're having trouble mustering the courage to act, think about your team. After all, they're the ones who are picking up the slack because the person you need to fire is not doing his job correctly. Demonstrating respect and compassion are important for morale. How you treat people on their way out the door is noticed by the rest of your employees.

Employee termination is undoubtedly one of the most disliked requirements of being a manager. But the termination of a marginal employee, if handled compassionately and maturely, will only generate relief from those who have had to put up with deadwood, slackers, and jerks, without being able to take action.

Remember—it's not the people you fire who make your life miserable. It's the ones you don't.

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