

GUIDELINES FOR EMPLOYEE TERMINATION MEETING

Per your request, here are guidelines for the upcoming meeting with your employee, regarding termination from your organization.

Who should convey the information? A supervisor who knows the employee and his/her work product. Ideally, this is the supervisor responsible for the employee's past performance reviews.

Additionally, we advise having one other person present, primarily as a witness. Good candidates for this role are an HR manager, the executive director—if not already conducting the meeting—another management level employee or a board member. This person's presence limits the organization's liability.

The conversation should be between the supervisor conveying the information and the employee. The "witness" is there to observe the meeting. However, if the supervisor requires some assistance, the witness may step in. Use caution, so that the employee does not feel overwhelmed or "piled on."

The witness should take discreet notes and record any items that require follow up for either party. After the meeting, the witness should record the meeting's content for company files and assign any tasks that are required that were discovered during the meeting.

How the information should be conveyed. First, I generally recommend that termination meetings be face-to-face conversations. Meeting in person conveys courtesy and respect not only for the fired employee, but also for employees who may later learn of the termination.

Second, while you verbally deliver the decision to terminate, you should already have a well-drafted termination letter that matches the information you deliver at this meeting. Provide no conflicting information at the meeting.

If your Board is unaware of the decision to terminate and/or time reasonably allows, it is advisable to allow the board to review the termination letter and all other related documents. This is particularly best practice when determining budget-related matters such as severance pay and/or continuation of benefits beyond employment date.

Regarding content and tone, it is best to be direct, professional, and brief about the reasons for the termination. Focus on employee behavior, not the employee personally. Should the employee request examples to support your decision, be prepared to give undisputed, recorded examples. However, avoid engaging in a disagreement regarding details. Instead, acknowledge the employee's input while remaining firm in your diligent review of the totality of the matter.

It is imperative to communicate that the decision to terminate is final and not open for future negotiations. You can be apologetic and sympathetic while remaining clear and definitive.

While included in the termination letter, remind the employee of his/her duty of loyalty to the organization and yours to her to keep these internal personnel matters confidential.

Avoid ending the meeting on a low note. Allow the employee to initially process the information. Help guide them toward the focus of next steps and the timeline to follow. Offer to answer questions about these steps.

Final Note: Throughout this situation, it is important to maintain extremely clear records of all the events and information. Your communication and documentation of this is crucial.

Conclusive Thoughts on Involuntary Termination and Future Best Practices. The employee should be aware that he/she may be terminated before the termination is effective. This meeting/decision to terminate should be the last step in a progressive disciplinary approach that has warned of termination. Exceptions to this are immediate and egregious events that warrant termination.

After this matter is behind you, I advise using it as a learning experience. Strengthen your review policies, especially their implementation. Open a personnel file on each employee as they are hired and document each review and unusual event. Take small steps to help employees change behavior before it is untenable and provide clear warning signs as unacceptable work performance continues.

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