

Preparing For and Conducting the Termination Meeting

Proper preparation for a termination meeting can help demonstrate respect for involved parties, limit liability exposure for the organization, and mitigate potential violence. The following checklist is designed to assist in facilitating uniform and equitable termination meetings.

Before a termination meeting, once again consult with those designated within the organization who primarily handle employee performance issues (Fire Chief, Administrator, Human Resources Department, Supervisors).

Did the organization consult with its legal counsel (experienced in employment and labor matters) before the termination meeting?

Ensure the termination decision is supported as much as practicable by written documentation in the personnel file.

Termination letters, severance agreements and other correspondence should be reviewed by legal counsel and those within the organization responsible for personnel administration.

Organize necessary information to provide to the employee including the final paycheck, benefit information, and any documents necessary for the employee's signature. Compile a list of the organization's property or other items that must be collected from the employee.

Select an available and appropriate witness for the termination meeting to help corroborate what is said, resolve any disputes, and protect against potential violence.

Does the designated witness understand his or her role in the termination meeting?

Have those facilitating the termination sessions received training on proper procedures?

Plan your dialogue and prepare a written outline to make sure all necessary points are covered with the employee.

Plan the location of the termination meeting to allow for no interruptions and as much confidentiality as possible (under no circumstances should an employee be terminated in the presence of peers or coworkers except a designated witness).

Has the dismissal meeting been scheduled at a time that will eliminate or minimize the employee's personal contact with co-workers before he or she leaves the premises?

Be respectful and professional while communicating the termination decision with the employee.

Tell the employee the legitimate business interests behind the organization's decision to terminate the working relationship. While it may not be legally required to give specific reasons for the termination, to give vague or no reasons may provoke suspicion. The former worker and remaining employees may speculate as to the "real reason" for the termination.

Firmly communicate the termination decision is final, unless new information is learned in the meeting that should delay the termination process.

Diligently document issues covered during the termination session. Listen to and document what the employee has to say.

Be careful what is said and written during the meeting. Everything written could be seen by others outside of the organization (i.e., attorneys, judges, juries).

Let the employee read and sign the document or form used to record the issues addressed during the termination meeting. If the employee refuses to sign, note the refusal on the form.

Ask the employee to update his or her contact information for benefit and tax purposes.

Request the employee participate in an exit interview to gain further insight into the organization, and learn of any alleged wrongdoing in the workplace.

Send an exit interview form by mail to the former employee if he/she is unavailable or otherwise chooses not to participate in the face-to-face exit interview.

Place documentation regarding the termination in the employee's personnel file.

Has the organization considered whether outplacement counseling is appropriate? An outplacement counselor on-site may help defuse a potentially hostile situation by redirecting the former employee's anger to focusing on the next step – moving forward.

After the termination, don't leave coworkers completely "in the dark." Without infringing on the terminated employee's privacy, inform those immediately impacted by the departure whether their job duties will change and, if appropriate, review organization policies and/or performance expectations with remaining personnel.

This checklist offers guidelines to help your organization determine and administer discipline in a fair and consistent manner. The checklist refers to "employees," but these risk management tips may also apply to volunteer members of your emergency services organization.