

TIP SHEET: Preparing for Termination

From *Termination of Employment* by Clark Reed and his associates at Netgain Partners Inc. (Cultural Careers Council Ontario and Cultural Human Resources Council, 2003).

Successful termination meetings are carefully thought through beforehand. These tips to planning and preparation are intended as basic guidelines only:

1. Review the employee's file and any documentation from previous performance discussions.
2. Plan what to say to avoid saying something that you will later regret. It happens all the time and can lead to major legal problems and costs. You might want to role play (in confidence) your "script" with another manager. If applicable, make sure your superiors or board are aware of the reasons for termination and the planned termination date.
3. Prepare to answer the typical questions that the employee may ask.
4. Have a checklist for organization property that should be returned by the employee. These may include office or building keys, laptop computer, cell phone, pager, pass card, etc. It's easy to forget something when you're trying to get through a stressful termination meeting, and notes will help.
5. Have the written termination letter ready at the meeting.
6. If you have questions about the process or circumstances that have resulted in the termination, consult a human resources specialist or labour lawyer.
7. It's advisable to have another person in the meeting, particularly if you anticipate any kind of negative reaction. Make sure this person knows their role and has been briefed on how to respond to any comments.
8. If appropriate, you may need to change security passwords, locks, etc.

What does a "successful" termination meeting look like? You can consider a termination meeting to have been successful if:

- The employee understands the essential information about his or her status.
- You have treated the person fairly and with respect.
- The organization fulfills its legal and ethical responsibilities.
- The disruption to other employees is minimal.

Note that a "calm and agreeable" terminated employee is not an essential component of a well-handled termination. Anticipate negative reaction, be prepared for it, and handle it as best you can -- but termination meetings are stressful for everyone. Ultimately you have little control over the person's reaction. They may have financial, family or health issues of which you are unaware that may affect their reaction. The best you can do is be prepared to handle anything that happens in a calm, professional and sensitive way.

The legal aspects of termination are governed by legislation and are subject to change. For definitive rules on employment standards and legal aspects of terminations, consult a labour lawyer or human resources specialist and refer them to the Ontario Ministry of Labour (www.labour.gov.on.ca).