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A Manager's Guide to Terminations

An employee termination can occur for any number of reasons including performance, change in role requirements, misconduct or insubordination. Although the reasons are varied, it is common for the termination day to be difficult for managers. Some basic guidelines in the planning and implementation of the termination will help to ensure that it is conducted in an effective, professional manner while minimizing legal exposure.

Are you ready to Terminate?

- What is the reason for terminating this person?
- Are the position's duties clearly defined?
- Have specific performance standards been established?
- Have performance expectations been communicated clearly?
- Has the associate's performance been evaluated fairly?
- Have formal performance reviews been conducted and dissatisfaction clearly communicated?
- Are there copies of performance evaluation reports, memos, etc.?
- Was the associate specifically informed that failure to meet the required performance level would lead to termination?
- Was reasonable time provided to correct performance deficiencies?
- Are there any underlying issues relating to age, sex, racial, or any type of discrimination which might affect this decision?
- Have other positions which the associate could perform been considered?

Planning the Termination

- Determine the effective date of the termination.
- Decide upon the reason(s) for the termination that will be communicated to the associate (e.g. management style, change in organizational needs, unsatisfactory performance.)
- Prepare the separation package in writing including: severance pay, continuation of benefits (COBRA), unused vacation time, bonuses, stock options, pension, 401(k), employment contracts and non-compete agreements.

Planning Continued...

- Schedule the Outplacement Services.
- Train the manager for the termination interview.
- Prepare the termination letter; include the date of termination, severance payment, continuation of benefits, outplacement services, return of company property and any waiver agreements.
- Establish a time and plan for the associate to remove personal belongings.
- Prepare a statement/communication for the remaining associates.
- Review the transition of responsibilities and assign duties to other associates.

Conducting the Termination Interview

- Schedule the meeting as early in the week as possible and at the least disruptive time of day.
- Avoid holidays, prior to vacations or other significant personal dates (e.g. birthdays).
- Plan exactly what you will say—script the interview.
- Initiate the meeting on time. Get right to the point.
- Be sure all aspects of the termination letter are covered and communicate the plan for removing personal belongings.
- Keep the meeting brief, 10-15 minutes at most.
- Communicate that the decision is based on an event or dissatisfaction with results rather than “personal” dissatisfaction with the terminatee.
- Ensure that the terminatee knows the termination is final.
- Do not say how badly you feel, offer advice, bargain with, seek the terminatee's approval or present important choices. The terminatee's frame of mind is not conducive to good decision making.
- Be considerate of the terminatee's feelings.
- Be prepared for all possible reactions.

Most managers must deal with terminations at one point or another. By preparing for these difficult circumstances in advance, you can ensure the process is handled as efficiently and fairly as possible. Your company will maintain a professional image and remaining employees will respect you for managing these often delicate situations in an organized and consistent manner.