

Employee Notification Process

Training Guide

Prepared by ADOA Shared Services

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INTRODUCTION

Informing an employee that they no longer have a job with the State is a difficult task and must be handled in a professional and caring manner. If done well, people will feel that they have been treated with dignity and their self-esteem has been protected. Equally important, they will leave the agency feeling as positive as possible and focused on their future challenge of gaining employment.

To accomplish these objectives, senior management should develop a strategy and plan for a reduction in force (RIF) and/or layoff. When planning for a reduction in force (RIF) and/or a layoff, management should consider three primary areas: the business needs, the human needs and the State Personnel Rules and statutes. Once the plan is in place, the focus should be on how the plan is implemented with consideration for the human factor. Treating affected employees professionally and with respect is of the utmost importance. Additionally, treating the remaining employees with sensitivity ensures morale, commitment, productivity, and retention are not adversely affected in the long-term. It is imperative to have a plan in place and to implement the plan with sensitivity and concern for all employees.

This guide has been established to assist directors, managers, supervisors and human resources professionals with the information and resources to prepare for and conduct employee separation notifications for affected employees and effectively manage the environment for remaining employees.

The guide will cover the following four areas needed for successful notifications:

- 1. Preparing for the RIF/Layoff**
 - a. Preparing the Separation Package
 - b. Developing the script
- 2. Conducting the Meeting**
 - a. Delivering the message
 - b. Managing employee reactions
- 3. Communicating with Remaining Employees**

OBJECTIVES

Notification Meeting Objectives for the State:

- Protect the State's image internally, to the general public, and for future recruitment
- Minimize negative impact on employees leaving and staying
- Conduct concise, yet compassionate, separation meetings

Notification Meeting Objectives for the Employee:

- Hears and understands the message as it is intended
- Retains dignity throughout the process
- Knows what to do next

MANAGEMENT PREPARATION FOR A RIF/LAYOFF

Initial Considerations

1. Review and/or prepare FAQ's in advance and ensure everyone in HR and management has a copy.
2. Decide who in the organization will deliver the message. It is preferable that the message come from senior management with the support of Human Resources.
3. Determine employee meeting time and location: Location should be a private business setting. Do not schedule advance meetings if possible. Affected employees should be scheduled just before the meeting. Review vacation schedules and have a back-up strategy in the event the employee is not available. ***Though not always possible, plan on meeting early in the week, and early in the day so follow-up support can be scheduled immediately afterward.*** You may want to have Capitol Police close by, but not within sight, to offer security for all concerned.
4. Decide whether the message will be delivered individually or in a group. If conducting individual meetings, you should have a private room to speak with each employee. If conducting group meetings, you should have a private area away from other employees.
5. Schedule a meeting with unaffected employees immediately following the initial notification. Let them know about the RIF/layoffs, who is affected, and how their roles and responsibilities might be changed going forward.
6. Have alternative transportation available for those who carpool or use public transportation.
7. Consider having medical emergency personnel on standby and/or have emergency numbers available.
8. Identify and prepare separation packages for affected employees and include the following:
 - a. Letter with employment end date
 - b. Benefits information
 - c. Contact information for HR, Benefits, ASRS, and Shared Services
 - d. EAP (if applicable)
 - e. Application process for AZ STATE JOBS (azstatejobs.gov)
 - f. Next steps
9. Prepare the messages and scripts for both affected and unaffected employees: know what you will say about the action being taken, the reason, and when and how it will happen. This will allow you to deliver the message in the most professional and humane way possible. (*Instructions and examples for preparing messages are included.*)

MANAGEMENT PREPARATION FOR A RIF/LAYOFF

Developing the Script

The following includes instructions on developing a script as well as three examples. These are examples only. Please develop a custom script that includes agency specific information.

Situation: State the situation/business reason for the RIF/Layoff

(e.g., “As you probably know, (employee’s first name), the agency is experiencing a significant budget deficit for 2019.”)

Decision: State the decision made

Uncovered *(e.g., “Over the past few weeks, senior management has had to make some very difficult decisions regarding agency staffing. I must unfortunately inform you that your services are no longer required and you are being separated as of (effective date).”)*

Covered *(e.g., “Over the past few weeks, senior management has had to make some very difficult decisions regarding agency staffing. I must unfortunately inform you that our agency is conducting a Reduction in Force and you have been identified as being affected. You are being separated from State service as of (effective date).”)*

Finality: State who made the decision and that it is final

(e.g., “The decision was made after a long and careful review of the options, realizing that many good people would be affected. This has been a very difficult decision and was not easily made. I want you to know that it has been reviewed at the highest levels within the agency and is a final decision.”)

Next Steps: State the employee’s next steps in the process

Uncovered *(e.g., “We have prepared an information package that will be helpful to you throughout this transition period. It provides you with information about your next steps. I understand that this is a shock, but I would encourage you to review this information as soon as possible. If you have any questions, contact _____.”)*

Covered *(e.g. “We have prepared an information package that will be helpful to you throughout this transition period. It provides you with information about your next steps. This packet and your letter will provide you with information about your retention point calculation. I understand that this is a shock, but I would encourage you to review this information as soon as possible. If you have any questions, contact _____.”)*

Offer of another position- Covered Employee

“As you probably know, (employee’s first name), the agency is experiencing a significant budget deficit for 2019.

CONDUCTING THE NOTIFICATION MEETING

Delivering the Message

The entire meeting should take no more than 10-15 minutes.

- Keep the message brief (two to five minutes).
- Explain the business decision or situation and the reason for the elimination of the employee's position.
- Provide the employment end date.
- Make sure the employee understands there are no alternatives and the decision is not negotiable.
- Express regret and avoid small talk and personal conversations.

Keep to the Script

Do	Don't
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ask people (person) to sit down and wait for everyone	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Say how are you?, Good to see you, etc.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use your prepared message - get to the point	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Try to make light of the situation or use humor
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be very clear about the action taken. Do not hesitate or add your own words	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Apologize, make excuses, or say you disagree with the message
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Affirm the current situation (why), what is happening (RIF/Layoff), and when it will happen	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have conversations (business or personal), or make small talk

Provide Next Steps

Do	Don't
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clarify the official final work date	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conduct a long meeting
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review the package (materials) with the employee	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make promises you cannot keep
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review all logistics for leaving the State, including equipment and materials that belong to the State: laptops, keys, badges	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explain expectations and duties during transition period. Always provide choices where possible	

You can always state that you appreciate and understand the employee's feelings and that you and the agency are very sorry these actions had to be taken. *Empathy and understanding will go a long way.* If you speak softly and with genuine concern, most employees will appreciate your sincere approach. After your opening statement, expect employees to have an array of reactions and emotions, some more difficult to handle than others. They will probably question the reasoning behind the reduction/layoff, so you will need to be prepared with responses and answers. The remainder of this document will assist you with these difficult communications.

MANAGING EMPLOYEE REACTIONS & EMOTIONS

Anticipate typical and possible reactions

Do	Don't
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be sure to listen attentively to the employee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Try to justify the business decision, management's actions or your involvement. Don't defend either the State or the employee or argue with the employee
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wait for the employee's response before proceeding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss other employees, whether they are part of the RIF/Layoff or not
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If needed, restate the message 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use platitudes or superfluous remarks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Follow the script. Again, do not add your interpretation or comments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimize or devalue the situation, or offer false expectations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide structure for the process and the employee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Side with the employee
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide general information about employees who have been affected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide specific information about which other employees have been affected

PROBABLE EMPLOYEE REACTIONS

Every employee will respond in some way; however, there are four typical reactions when employees are informed of a job loss: **Sadness/Realistic, Anger, Shock, and Denial/Control.**

Response: Sadness/Realistic

Employee	Supervisor
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows limited but sad emotional display Shows disappointment Expresses realistic acceptance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliver the message, staying with the script Answer questions related to the employee only Provide necessary information and clarity regarding next steps

Response: Anger

Employee	Supervisor
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Challenges the supervisor Verbally abuses the supervisor Expresses negative comments about the state and the situation Escalates to aggression 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remain calm Do not argue, become defensive or threaten Allow the employee the opportunity to vent Let the employee know you heard them Provide time for the employee to regain composure Listen for rational questions, such as, "What are my next steps, or what are my options?" as a sign that they have their anger under control End the meeting and coordinate progressing the employee to the next phase or to exit the building

Response: Shock

Employee	Supervisor
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No outward reaction • Blank expression or stare • Silent, no response to the message 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide the employee the time and opportunity to internalize the message • Allow the employee the opportunity to express emotion • Provide structure and support through next steps: explanation of benefits, etc. • Unusual reactions should be reported to HR • Use silence to allow the employee to process the information and situation

Response: Denial/Control

Employee	Supervisor
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unemotional, flat, or too controlled • Expresses relief • In control, but denying the situation or reality • Extremely distressed and distraught when reality sets in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure understanding of the message, if in doubt, repeat or restate the information • Have the employee restate what they heard • State that the RIF/Layoff is not negotiable • Manage the employee's anxiety by reviewing next steps • Contact HR if unusual reactions • Do not try to assist the employee in processing their emotions. Offer EAP or other assistance if applicable

SUGGESTED TRAINING & PREPARATION

Many times managers and supervisors feel prepared to conduct employee meetings; however, conducting employee separation notification meetings may require role plays and practice sessions to be able to conduct them professionally and successfully. It is recommended that each person involved in conducting these meetings participates in role plays covering each of the **four typical responses** with an experienced consultant or HR professional. Staff from ADOA Shared Services are available for role playing the meeting.

To conduct a role play, have one person play the employee and the other person play the manager. The employee should respond to the manager's message with one of the typical reactions. The manager should then follow the recommendations for that reaction. Complete all four of the reactions listed and repeat scenarios where necessary.

COMMUNICATING WITH REMAINING EMPLOYEES

On notification day and during the transition period

Do	Don't
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be visible and meet with your employees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disappear after notifications
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be prepared to communicate the "Why" and "How" of the situation and reframe the need 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give pep talks that ignore issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Sell the problem" which caused the action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt a business-as-usual attitude
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expect emotional comments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet or communicate only with favorites
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be specific about work tasks, expectations and priorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Load people up with work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide consistent information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make careless comments and use inappropriate corporate metaphors (e.g., "We're lean and mean!")
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek out rumors and concern 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get defensive (<i>This wasn't my decision!</i>)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State what is ending and what is not ending 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guess about unresolved issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show empathy for all employees • Involve them in adjusting work priorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make promises you (or the agency) can't keep
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide information, support and structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak negatively about employees who have left the organization

You might want to hold a meeting with remaining employees immediately after the initial notification meeting. Having a similar script for these meetings will be helpful to keep the message on target and consistent with other messages being communicated.

MANAGER'S SEPARATION CHECKLIST

- Review and practice your script. Obtain details from Human Resources or appropriate agency source, such as the business reason, effective separation date, etc.
- Reserve a private space in which to conduct the separation notification meeting.
- Anticipate employee reactions and plan your responses. Determine ahead of time any potential needs or personal situations that affected employees may be experiencing that will make this news additionally traumatic, i.e. divorce, serious medical condition, recent death in the family, etc.
- Develop or review procedures for handling medical emergencies; consider having medical personnel on-site for notification; keep emergency phone numbers ready.
- Consider those who have carpoled or use public transportation; ensure alternatives have been considered for getting these employees home if necessary.
- Obtain SEPARATION PACKAGE and information from Human Resources and review it.
- Map out the employee's next steps: Human Resources, return of property, collection of personal belongings, exit, etc. If possible allow the employee to make a choice (e.g., whether to collect belongings immediately or return later to do so).
- Plan for the employees' retrieval of personal belongings if they will be exiting immediately. Will you or security personnel be present?
- Identify property to be returned by separating employees (keys, passkeys, cell phones, state vehicles, computers, laptops, credit cards, bus cards, special equipment, etc.)
- Identify the person who will collect these items, and where and how to store them discreetly while you are conducting the next separation meeting. (Most people who must turn in their state vehicle immediately after the meeting can call someone for a ride; however, try to anticipate whether anyone who turns in a vehicle will have a problem getting home.)
- Coordinate with the appropriate technical departments to terminate the separating employees' voice mail and computer access after, not before, separation notification.
- Consider security issues. Make sure communication lines are working.
- Plan a communication meeting to reassure remaining employees; anticipate their reactions and plan your responses.

MANAGER'S FINAL PREPARATION

Know that this is a time of stress and preparing and implementing RIFs/Layoffs can be very difficult on managers and supervisors. It is recommended to take some time to take care of you.

- Know that it is natural and human to be concerned and nervous.
- Be aware of your emotions, this helps you stay calm. Take steps to reassure and calm yourself so you can deal effectively with employees.
- Come to terms with the business decision in order to deliver the message effectively and consistently.
- Recognize when you need support and seek appropriate counsel.