



Termination - how to make it a good process

Terminating an employee's employment is one of the toughest tasks you will face as a manager. Therefore, in this guide, we have collected PFA's tips for terminating an employee as respectfully and with as much dignity as possible. The termination process is important. Not just for the employee whose employment has been terminated, but also for you as a manager, for the remaining employees and, not least, the company's future reputation. Therefore, all parties involved deserve the best possible process.

Tips for preparing the termination process

Step 1: Prepare thoroughly for all the steps in the process

- **Who oversees the termination process?**

We always recommend that it is the immediate manager who terminates the employee. Sometimes, a representative from HR or an employee representative will also participate. No matter who you decide to involve, it is important that it is the manager terminating the employee who takes the lead. The employee will know that when it comes down to it, it is the manager's decision to terminate him or her. Therefore, it is the terminating manager who must communicate that decision. It is a sign of decency and respect when the manager handles the conversation - it reinforces your role as a manager if the relationship with the employee has otherwise been good. The terminated employee will be likely to respect that approach, and it will also be easier for him or her to accept the decision. If you are a manager in an organisation where things work differently, it is important to be transparent towards the employee about who is leading the conversation and why.

- **Who needs to be notified of the termination?**

Once you have carefully thought the process through, you should draft a communication plan that can be set to and aligned with the relevant parties. The plan for terminating the employee should be approved by your manager and the HR department. You must also consider which other colleagues might need to be notified of the termination and when they should be informed. It is best if you notify the terminated employee of the decision shortly after the management team is informed (this typically happens a few days before the actual termination). When drafting the communication plan, you should use specific dates and times for all steps in the termination process, so that everyone can see what has been agreed - for example: xxx will notify departments Y, Z and P on (date) (time). This will ensure that procedures are followed and that you also have a plan for handling internal communication. Clear communication throughout the process shows both responsibility and professionalism, and a good plan ensures that all relevant parties feel informed.

- **Why is the employee being terminated?**

It is important that you are clear about why you are terminating the employee. Many people are currently losing their jobs due to the impact the corona crisis is having on the company they work for - perhaps the company is outsourcing, or there is less work to attend to or the organisation might be in the process of restructuring. It is much easier for an employee to move on from losing his or her job if the termination is because of business matters and not the employee personally.

Choose your core message wisely. Keep the core message simple, short, and precise, and you must stick to the argument that resulted in the employee being terminated. It is extremely important that communication is consistent, both internally and externally, as this ensures clarity and understanding. We recommend that you are well-prepared for the conversation before the termination takes place. As a manager, terminating an employee is never a walk in the park, but you can make things easier for yourself by being as well-prepared as possible for the conversation.

- **How should it be done?**

We recommend that you invite your employee to a face-to-face meeting and that you prepare a written notice of termination, which you bring with you to the meeting. If you do not have an HR department to help you with this, you can find some inspiration here (in Danish):

<https://blog.as3transition.dk/outplacement/hvad-skal-der-staa-i-en-opsigelse-af-en-medarbejder>.

Before the meeting, you must decide whether the employee is to be released from his or her duty with immediate effect, or if you expect the employee to continue working for the duration of the notice period. If the employee is to be released from duty, then you must decide whether the employee is permitted to say goodbye to their colleagues, and if so, when. You must also ascertain whether there are working tools that must be collected, and if so, how they should be collected. Should the employee be sent home at once? Is a handover necessary in terms of work tasks, and what about the employee's access to the company systems, etc.?

We recommend a process where the employee can say goodbye to colleagues, either face to face or a farewell reception where you as a manager can also say a few words of thanks. Discuss with the employee whether this is something he or she would like. This does not need to be decided on the day of the termination but can wait until a follow-up meeting.

- **Where should it be done?**

The physical framework is important to consider. Where do you want to have the meeting with your employee? Select a room where there is space for both of you to sit comfortably, and which is not adjacent to other colleagues - this allows you to sit and talk in a quiet space. Consider the seating arrangements in the room so that you do not have practical issues to consider on the day itself. Make sure that there are refreshments and a pen and notepad in case there are questions that must be addressed. It may seem like a small thing, but out of respect for the employee being terminated, it might be smart to have tissues at hand that you can offer if your employee gets emotional about the situation.

- **When should it take place?**

When possible, we recommend that you have termination meetings on either a Tuesday or Wednesday. This gives the employee the opportunity to talk to both you and their colleagues before the weekend. You can also begin dealing with the questions and challenges that may result from the termination immediately. The time of day is not important, if you ensure that an employee is able to go home right afterwards and let things sink in.

- **Next steps in the termination process**

Consider what the next steps will be. What things need to be considered in terms of work tasks? How will the other employees be notified? It is important that the employee who has just lost his or her job feels that there are clear procedures and that the decision to terminate the employment is well-founded. Remember to develop a plan for the remaining employees. It is important that you have a meeting with the remaining employees and allow for reflection both right after their colleague is terminated and in the following period. If you feel that the employee group has strong feelings about what is going on, then have individual discussions with each employee as well. It is worth the effort.

• Next steps for the terminated employee

Consider how the employee can get help processing what has happened. For some employees, losing their job will come as a massive shock and feelings such as despair, abandonment and worries about the future can be overwhelming. As their manager, we recommend that you at least offer to assist the employee and have follow-up talks during the process. However, you should also consider what other things you can do to help. PFA recommends the following, in order of priority:

- 1) An advisory process for terminated employees.¹
- 2) That you recommend your employee contacts his/her unemployment fund, job centre and/or union and find out what they can offer in terms of the job-searching process ahead.²
- 3) That you let the employee know that he or she can contact PFA Healthcare Hotline if the employee has general well-being issues due to losing the job.³
- 4) Refer to materials available online that may be useful in terms of how to move on after losing a job and where employees can pay for specific advisory services if needed.⁴

Step 2: Terminating the employee

- The notification: Ensure that you notify the employee of the termination within the first two minutes of the meeting, otherwise you will just be prolonging the agony. For example, say: "I've called you in for a meeting because, unfortunately, I have to let you go."
- Speak clearly and precisely: When delivering the message, explain the decision by getting straight to the point and avoid trying to downplay the seriousness of the decision/the termination. For example: "We have seen a significant decrease in incoming work lately, and therefore I have to let some people go." Repeat yourself if needed and say the same thing every time. Be prepared for how you will respond if the employee asks: "why me." You may wish to give the employee a brief overview of the tasks, competences and needs the company will have going forward and explain why the employee was not the best match for that. Keep your answers short. For example, you could say: "I have assembled our future team based on the competences and needs that will be most critical in the coming period."
- Be present: Make sure to maintain an appropriate level of eye contact during the entire meeting and exude calm.
- Keep your own feelings out of it but show empathy. For example, you could say: "I understand that this puts you in a difficult situation." Do not say: "This has been really tough on me, making this decision."
- Give the employee the space to react: Silence, anger, or tears are natural reactions in this situation, and as a manager you need to be able to deal with any kind of reaction. Acknowledge the employee's feelings: "I understand why you are angry."
- The written notice of termination: Ask the employee to read the written notice of termination when he or she is ready and ask the employee to sign it to confirm the receipt.
- Schedule a follow-up meeting: whether the employee will continue working during the notice period or is asked to leave immediately, it is always a good idea to have a follow-up meeting the day after or within a few days. Besides demonstrating that you care about the employee, it might also be an effective way of evaluating your own process by learning how the employee is feeling after the termination meeting. The follow-up meeting can be held by phone, but it is often best to meet face-to-face so that you can have eye contact and come to an agreement concerning practical issues related to transferring work tasks, saying goodbye to colleagues, etc. For example, at the end of the termination meeting, you could say: "Now you probably need some time to let this sink in, but I think we should have a follow-up meeting where we can discuss the practical issues. If you have any questions or comments before then, please feel free to contact me."

Also pay attention to your own reactions as a manager and get feedback from your closest colleagues, friends or family.

¹ A professional job advisory process where the employee gets support for dealing with what has happened as well as specific tools for the new job searching process. Contact your key account manager or preventive care partner at PFA if you want recommendations for this.

² Most unions and unemployment funds will be able to help with job searching and career goals, and they will typically have an extensive list of offers for their members, including courses on how to write a good job application, free CV templates, direct feedback on applications and CVs, etc.

³ If the employee reacts badly and the subsequent process of coming to terms with losing a job results in a specific need for treatment, then recommend that the employee contact his or her own doctor with a view to obtaining a referral for psychological counselling.

⁴ For example here (in Danish): <https://www.as3transition.dk/jobraadgivning-til-opsagte/jeg-er-blevet-opsagt/>