

Practical Tips for Maintaining Dignity during Termination Meetings: Everybody Wins

Article By:

Christina M. Kennedy

This past week, the nation was shocked with yet another senseless act of violence in the workplace. [On Monday, a disgruntled former employee](#), walked into his former employer's job site and killed 5 of his former co-workers before taking his own life. No one would suggest that the employer could have done something differently to prevent this kind of violence. However, these events underscore the importance of having strong practices and procedures in place to handle events surrounding the employment termination. These steps allow employers do everything they can to deescalate and defuse these, admittedly, difficult situations. In addition, these steps can serve to protect employers, from a legal perspective, in case the former employee later raises claims relating to the termination or the reasons supporting the termination.

Today, let us focus on the actual termination meeting and steps that the employer can take in order to create an environment that defuses tension and is handled with respect and professionalism. When thinking about this meeting, ask yourself – how would you want an employer to fire your mother, favorite uncle, or best friend? Viewing terminations through these practical and empathetic lenses may provide helpful insights. Yes, some of this makes common sense, but as we know emotions often can get the best of anyone. Being thoughtful and intelligent in your approach is key to the success of the meeting. Here are some best practices to consider:

1. [Setting up the meeting](#): Be prepared and plan ahead. Employees should be terminated in face-to-face meetings. Resist the urge to terminate via e-mail, text, voicemail, or Twitter. Hint: [informing the employee in question of the employer's decision to terminate via the media](#) is not advisable. In addition, consult with the appropriate company official to make sure all questions regarding benefit continuations, final wage payments, etc., are handled in advance. Who should be present at the termination meeting? Ideally, the employer will have 2 representatives present. Resist the urge to put too many people in the room. The spokesperson and the note taker. Each should be able to project a degree of empathy and remain calm in situations that are fluid. The spokesperson must be familiar enough with the facts in order to be able to properly respond to comments/questions from the employee in question. Also be mindful as to location. The meeting should also be held in a sufficiently private location so that other employees cannot overhear the conversation. In addition, the meeting should not occur in the employee's office, but rather the office of the spokesperson

or other neutral territory like a conference room.

2. During the meeting: Give fair notice and opportunity to be heard. During the meeting, the spokesperson should give the employee concrete examples of the issues that have led to the decision to terminate their employment. Remember, raising issues after the fact following any claim filed by the employee may provide arguments for pretext. After all, if reason x was *really* the justification for a termination, why didn't the employer just say so during the meeting? Once the issues have been explained, give the employee an opportunity to respond and explain (if the employee wishes to do so). Listen to what the employee has to say. If the employee raises credible information that would affect the termination decision, the decision can be put on pause, in order for the employer to conduct additional investigation. If the termination decision is not affected by any information raised during the meeting, inform the employee of the termination decision.

Take home message: We have discussed in previous articles the importance of establishing legitimate and non-discriminatory business reasons which serve as a basis for decisions that affect the terms and conditions of employment. However, the most reasoned and justified bases cannot fix a termination meeting that goes horribly wrong. After all, employees who leave termination meetings feeling like the termination was handled with professionalism and respect, despite feeling the expected levels of anger and/or disappointment, may be less likely to engage in violent acts or call a lawyer to file a complaint. While there is no way to avoid every possible circumstance, using these tips can help the employer handle a difficult situation with civility and respect, allowing the employee to retain a degree of dignity.

© 2025 Foley & Lardner LLP

National Law Review, Volume VII, Number 163

Source URL: <https://natlawreview.com/article/practical-tips-maintaining-dignity-during-termination-meetings-everybody-wins>