



# Perspectives on Termination

by the Human Resource Professional and Employees

Surveyed: 136 random members of the HR Network and 228 members of The Five O'Clock Club

Survey context to HR: Think of a recent occasion when a manager had to let an employee go.

Survey context to employees dismissed: Think of a time when you were dismissed from a job.

Question/ Issue:	Human Resources said:	Employees said:
How do you feel about the way the dismissal was handled?	80% were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the way the person was let go.	56% were "unsatisfied" or "very unsatisfied" with the way they were let go.
During the dismissal meeting: Was the employee given an explanation about why he or she was being let go?  Was the employee's performance discussed?	94% said the employee was informed about the reason for the dismissal.  82% said discussion of performance was either <b>neutral or negative</b> .	74% said they were given a reason for the dismissal.  62% said discussion of performance was either <b>neutral or negative</b> .
Should the person have been let go? (Was the dismissal necessary?)	Thought the dismissal was necessary with 87% answering "yes" or "definitely."	69% said the dismissal was " <b>not</b> " or " <b>definitely not</b> " necessary.
Do you think the dismissed employee would <i>recommend</i> the organization to a friend who was looking for a job?	50% said the employee would recommend the organization.	<b>69% of employees said they would "not" or "definitely not" recommend the organization.</b>
Can you think of ways the dismissal could have been handled better?	63% said yes, the dismissal could have been handled better.	74% said yes, the dismissal could have been handled better.
How do you think the way the employee was handled during the dismissal affected his or her job search?	28% rated the impact on job search as positive, 60% as neutral and 12% as negative or very negative.	15% rated the impact on their job search as positive, 44% as neutral, and 42% as negative or very negative.
<b>How were long timers treated?</b> 24% of employees fired had 5 to 25 years tenure.	11% received a positive word about their performance. <b>89% received a negative or neutral word about their performance.</b>	

## WHAT THE EMPLOYEES SAID about their dismissal

### Dismissal notification:

Companies expect two weeks' notice from employees. Employees in our survey said they wanted two weeks notice also.

### The brutality of a same day / same minute dismissal:

- ◆ Two weeks notice or a week's notice or some sort of heads up would have been professional. Instead I was given same day notice and one hour to clear out, and escorted off the property.

- ◆ I would have preferred to negotiate a departure and to be able to announce that I was leaving. Many people were dismayed at my sudden disappearance. The whole event was humiliating.
- ◆ I was treated like a criminal. I was told I could not go back to my desk, if I had forgotten something. I had to leave through a special exit.

### The unkindness of the way they were dismissed:

- ◆ I received a phone call while out of town on business. It made the dismissal that much more chilling. He could

## WHAT THE EMPLOYEES SAID, contd.

have waited a day until I returned home.

- ◆ Society has become so litigious that there is more focus on covering the company's hind parts than on doing the right thing for employees.
- ◆ Layoffs were done in a mass meeting, which I was not told about. I found out I was laid off when I got back from lunch and everyone was reacting to the news.
- ◆ I was on the publicity committee. We had a conference call on the Tuesday before the "black Friday" bloodbath. That's how I heard about it.
- ◆ They got rid of me; I put a lot of time in there.

### Lack of recognition for past performance.

- ◆ They could have acknowledged my contributions to the growth of the company.
- ◆ There was no recognition of my contribution to the company.
- ◆ Could have been more balanced in his assessment; instead focused on and created negative feedback to strengthen his case.

### Lack of warning and explanation about the dismissal.

- ◆ Should have been remediation steps if there was a problem. Had perfect evaluations prior to this problem.
- ◆ I could have been informed at any point in time that expectations of my performance were not being met, and given an opportunity to change.
- ◆ I could have been given a warning of some sort; I should have been able to speak with a superior about it; my colleagues should not have been told I was fired.

## DISMISSAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ◆ **Treat people with respect and empathy:**
  - ◆ Treat people with respect.
  - ◆ More empathy from senior management would have been appreciated.
- ◆ **Better severance pay or outplacement services/ career coaching.**
- ◆ **HR should have be present at any dismissal.**

## HUMAN RESOURCES EXAMPLES OF POSITIVE DISMISSALS

### Prepare managers for the dismissal:

- ◆ Dismissals are always very stressful. I have found that when managers are prepared with a little bit of a script, they stand up to the pressure better. The last termination I assisted with when far more smoothly than it might have because the manager was prepared and we had a decent severance package to present.

### Provide support for employees being laid-off:

- ◆ Turndown in business necessitated lay off of several employees. Brought in resume writing session for those needing assistance, offered assistance in photocopying, and offered managerial level outplacement services. This was a "good" experience. Those in the lay-off group felt the company provided beneficial services to them. Those who survived the lay-off felt good about how the company treated those in the lay-off group.
- ◆ Employee was allowed ample time to remain on company payroll prior to actual last day worked in order to conduct prospective new job search. This enabled her to seek new opportunity while she was gainfully employed. This boosted her confidence and made her more marketable. More employers should consider offering job counseling while the employee is still in transition not necessarily always after they're separated.
- ◆ I have terminated hundreds of employees, so no one story stands out. Only that most of the time when an employee is ultimately dismissed, there is a sense of relief. It's difficulty for people to admit that the job is too difficult for them to succeed at and they are afraid to leave and face the unknown. We terminate with a transition package and help start them on a job search.

### Provide performance counseling for poor performing employees:

- ◆ We had a seven-month employee who had been counseled at the two and four month mark on her deficient performance in an important part of her job. She admitted that the technical part was complex but that she was working hard to do it. She handled the clerical functions satisfactorily but continued to make errors in the analytical functions. Rather than continuing to try to make the employee into something she wasn't, we decided to terminate her. We referenced the prior discussions about improving, told her the improvement didn't happen and therefore it was time to part the company. We paid her to the end of the month. She said she understood, apologized for not making it work and thanked us for the notice time: **Moral: Proper counseling and documentation lead to a "no surprises" dismissal.**
- ◆ When a dismissal is done properly, the employee feels that they have been treated fairly. In many instances, the only communication that an employee receives is when they are in HR with their supervisor. It is difficult because they are not receiving the timely feedback from their supervisor. I always try to be forthright and

specific as possible with an employee and threat them with respect. I try to empathize how difficult it is going to be for them to go home and tell their loved ones that their employment was terminated.

- ◆ As the HR point person involved, I always stay focused on the ethical and legal aspects. Do not be persuaded by the department if the decision-making information is not substantial enough. Remember, would you feel confident about what you say or communicate during a termination if the whole company and CEO were watching? If not, you should think things through again.
- ◆ My HR Motto: I believe that no discharge should be a surprise to an employee. The employee should have significant information about their manager's expectations and where they are falling short with an ability to perform appropriately. The Company's responsibility is to help someone achieve their best, and treat them with dignity if they haven't.
- ◆ I worked for an organization that did not believe in giving verbal or written warnings of any kind. Any time an employee was brought to my office to be terminated they had a complete look of shock on their face and had absolutely no idea that there was any issue with their performance. I always felt that this was a failure on the part of the manager. The manager never took the time to help train or point out areas in which an employee needed to improve, and the employee assumed that they were doing everything the manager wanted. At least with a warning, you can give employees an idea that an aspect of their performance is not up to par and they need to improve, which they often do. In the worst case scenario, if they do get fired at least they were made aware that their performance was lacking, so they are not completely shocked when it occurs.
- ◆ A dismissal that I was involved in that went well was with an employee who had personal issues that were impacting their work performance. The employee was given support through our EAP program and still did not improve their work performance. The manager felt that the work that needed to get done was not getting done and that it was now necessary for dismissal. The employee was well aware that if she did not show improvement in her performance that she would be separated from the agency. At the dismissal meeting, the employee said that she had basically "fired herself" because she hadn't done her job. For an employee to be clear that they had been given the opportunity to improve and they choose not to and are now faced with the consequences of the decision they made and own it was a great process to participate in and witness.
- ◆ At its best a person should be given 1 to 2 verbal warnings then a written. It's important that the written warning states the problem, anecdote and Consequences if the

problem does not improve. Also a time unit for the anecdote to work.

- ◆ Since we put our new "warning" system into place termination have gone much smoother. The warnings are more difficult for the employee to take than the termination. They are usually in shock but are more verbal about the stating their side. If they feel there is no hope for them to change and they do not like their job or manager they usually put themselves on pause and just wait for their package. If they are surprised and don't agree with the warnings and it is something that is changeable you will see a 360 degree change in that week.

One example is an employee who was very proud, received the warning and disliked his new boss. He fought for over an hour with everything we were saying. He barely improved, really had outgrown his position and did not get along with his manager. In the termination 30 days later he had lists of things he thought he had improved on, we said it was not time to discuss and that it was not working out. I started going over his severance agreement and he asked if the two managers could leave. He then took out a resignation letter from his pocket and said he would rather resign than be let go. We agreed that he could stay one week and actively look. The next day he came into my office said he did not know what severance was and took the package.

- ◆ Generally I think the more HR is involved and the more notice is given to HR to prepare the better the dismissal goes.
- ◆ I have been involved in many exit interviews and unfortunately most people do not see it coming. They do not take responsibility for their own actions or lack of actions. The worst scenario is when an individual becomes so angry and walks out leaving behind any information and paperwork about remaining benefits, i.e. Medical COBRA. We mail the info to the home address in record.

#### **Treat the employee being dismissed with dignity and respect:**

- ◆ We should never forget to treat the employee as a person. I feel that is where HR comes in—we can offer the human touch that managers may forget in looking at the bottom line.
- ◆ After announcing to 100 employees, in one of our manufacturing facilities, that we would be closing them down in one year, I received a standing ovation for being forthright with them and treating them with respect.

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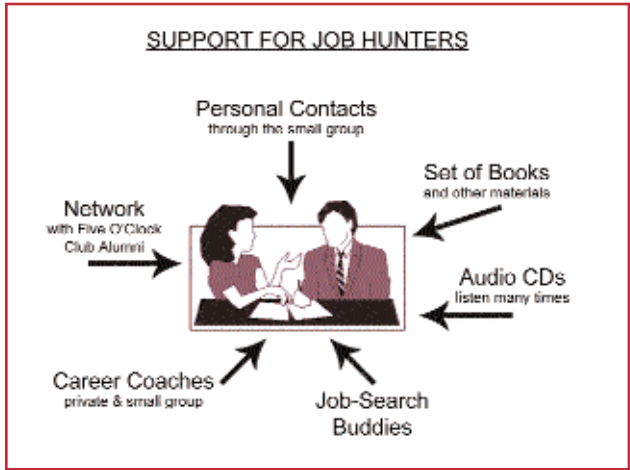
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- Overburdened coaches.
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- **Guaranteed number of hours of private coaching** coupled with weekly small-group strategy sessions headed by a senior coach.
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Platinum (2-year program)	\$15,000	40
<u>Premium</u> (15-month program)	<u>\$10,000</u>	<u>28</u>
Standard	\$7,500	18
<b>Executives earning \$100,000 to \$200,000 / yr</b>		
<u>Premium</u>	<u>\$5,000</u>	<u>14</u>
Standard	\$4,000	9
Bare-bones	\$3,000	5
<b>Professionals / managers: under \$100,000 / yr</b>		
<u>Premium</u>	<u>\$3,000</u>	<u>8</u>
Bare-bones	\$2,000	3



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