

Tips for supporting staff during a workforce reduction

Telling staff about a reduction in workforce or layoff can be one of the hardest things a manager has to do during their career. Managers may have anxiety about how to handle the situation. Following is an overview of how to address the reduction before it happens, provide support during the process and respond to the concerns of the remaining staff.

Before a reduction: Addressing fear

Announcements about a pending reduction in workforce can rattle staff and impact productivity. A reduction in the workforce is a challenging and sensitive time for everyone involved.

- **Maintain composure and be transparent.** The manager sets the tone, so be careful not to show panic. Work with your leadership to help people understand why the company is making this decision. Be as honest as you can, and let your staff know you care about their careers.
- **Acknowledge concerns.** A potential reduction in the workforce is just one of many concerns people have right now. People worry about inflation, the increased cost of living, widespread viruses and many other world events. If possible, provide a timeline and information about company assistance such as severance pay or career services to those who lose their jobs. Let them know they can get help for their stress and anxiety through their Employee Assistance Program.
- **Highlight what employees can control.** Encourage staff to clean up their resumes, create a list of accomplishments and update their LinkedIn profiles.

When a reduction in workforce happens: Supporting yourself and your staff

- **Acknowledge your feelings.** As a manager, you may experience sadness, anxiety and guilt about telling people they must lose their jobs. Recognize that these feelings are normal, be patient with yourself and be open with those closest to you that this is a difficult time. Remember that your Employee Assistance Program provides management support services.
- **Lead with care and compassion.** Acknowledge how painful job losses are for everyone. Treat affected staff with dignity and respect and give them time to process the information. Be sensitive to those that remain and help them feel more comfortable about the road ahead.
- **Anticipate tough questions and emotional reactions.** You can't predict how a person will react to the news but listening to what they say demonstrates that you care about them. Consult with human resources on the appropriate way to respond to questions and reactions.

After the reduction in workforce: Responding to concerns

Recognize that this is a difficult time for the remaining staff. Be patient and clear about the future without overpromising.

- **Be honest and straightforward.** Let staff know what you can about plans to move forward as effectively as possible. Help them identify alternative solutions, reprioritize assignments, extend deadlines or find efficiencies.
- **Make yourself available.** Make room on your calendar for conversations and check in regularly. Let staff know you want to hear from them earlier rather than later if they feel overloaded.
- **Reinforce support resources.** Remind staff that their Employee Assistance Program provides support for anxiety, stress and other mental health and emotional wellbeing topics.
- **Expect lower productivity.** Allowing staff time to process the layoff and positively adapt to the change will help morale and engagement.