1. Managing the Reduction in Force Meeting

2. Managing the Survivors of the Reduction in Force

3. Rebuilding Your Area after the Reduction in Force
Managing the Separation Meeting

Conducting employment separation meetings are a fact of life for supervisors. Though it is something that is usually looked on as an unpleasant task, if handled well, it can be productive for both the University and the person being separated.

The six objectives of the meeting should be:

1. Communicate the decision, providing the facts clearly and simply.
2. Present the decision as an irrevocable one.
3. Explain separation benefits. (Provide handout)
4. Discuss logistics or work transition.
5. Encourage the affected worker to take full advantage of the valuable outplacement services offered through Human Resources and Workforce Development.
6. Encourage the employee to take positive steps.

The following outline is designed to assist the supervisor to communicate clearly and effectively.

The Importance of Planning the Separation Meeting

There are many factors to be considered in planning a separation meeting. The supervisor must realize that the meeting may represent the last time that he/she will be speaking with that employee. The meeting should be well thought out ahead of time so that all necessary business can take place during the interview. "After thoughts" are to be avoided if possible. The factors listed below should be carefully considered prior to the separation meeting.

Setting the place and time of the meeting - Although the day the separation actually occurs is set by the University, the supervisor should be in control of the time and place where the separation meeting will occur. The time of the day is critical, especially when multiple separations are going to occur. The separation meetings should not have to be repeated or rescheduled. The best time is at the very beginning of the scheduled work time. The supervisor’s office offers a good setting, providing an environment where the supervisor maintains a sense of control. This sense of control can be jeopardized if the meeting takes place in the employee’s work area. The important factor is to minimize rumors and pre-meeting speculation. Conducting the meeting in the employee’s work area can result in a situation that is undignified and/or embarrassing to both the supervisor and the employee.
The meeting is mandatory - The meeting(s) should not be announced too far in advance. The best policy is to not publicize the meeting until just before it is to occur. The employee must know that the scheduled meeting is a "can't miss one". If the individual senses bad news, he/she may take evasive measures such as exercising vacation privileges, calling in sick, or leaving early. Such tactics only serve to delay the inevitable.

Keep it short - Straightforward, "brass tacks" delivery of information is crucial. The information, which must be conveyed, is simple and should be stated clearly and concisely. The terminating supervisor should not dwell on any issue. Although it may seem considerate to "talk it over" with the employee, at this point it only prolongs a difficult situation. The employee should know that the decision is irrevocable.

The proper tone - The supervisor should be business-like and to the point throughout the meeting. The supervisor should show no emotion. It is natural to do so, but the supervisor can lose sight of the purpose of the meeting. A show of emotion can decrease the supervisor's effectiveness, and the employee could perceive that the decision may be reversible.

The use of a "second" - The supervisor should have a "neutral" person from the University available at the time of the separation meeting, to discuss outplacement services, and other provided services. This should occur immediately after the separation meeting and in a different office. A second supervisor or Human Resources person should be present during the termination meeting, providing the terminating supervisor with a sense of support, as well as being a valuable witness. If there is any debate about what was said in the meeting, the second person can offer a first hand account. This is especially important if there is potential for litigation. The second person can also be used to help the employee remove personal effects from the office and act as an intermediary in the return of items owned by the University.

Introduction of Outplacement Services - This final step will involve:

- Referring the employee to Human Resources; and
- Encouraging the employee to utilize the services offered.

In reality, for many laid off workers this is an opportunity to plan for the future with the assistance of trained vocational specialists and take advantage of the many benefits offered.

Agenda for the Separation Meeting

The supervisor has several main objectives for the separation meeting: to announce the separation, and to review the reasons for the release. Ideally, the supervisor should need only several minutes to accomplish these objectives. The third and most important objective is for the supervisor to complete the
meeting as promptly as possible without being vague or short-changing what needs to be said.

The actual agenda for the meeting may vary from supervisor to supervisor depending on individual style, but the meeting should cover the following areas:

- A brief form of welcome that puts the employee at ease.
- The actual announcement of the separation.
- **Reason for separation** - The supervisor must be sure that the reason for separation has been clearly and simply formulated and communicated to the employee, ensuring that they understand. The reason communicated to the employee must be the same as it is communicated to the University. If there is not a consistent stand on this issue, it could be problematic later if the employee hears conflicting stories.
- **Benefits information** - The supervisor should know the exact terms of the separation. A letter format is available from Human Resources as well as a packet of information discussing benefits. Discussion of outplacement assistance provides a natural transition to help the employee start looking to the future.
- **Housekeeping** - The meeting should proceed from the separation announcement to the "reason for leaving" and benefits, to the business of collecting keys and cards and informing the employee when he/she can clean out their office/work area. Ensure that the employee knows that cleaning out their workspace may occur before or after regular working hours, and that a supervisor or University representative will accompany them. In this way, the danger of interruption or discomfort is lessened. Someone should be present to assist the individual as well as to ensure that the person does not (even unknowingly) leave with University property. Again, it may be decided that another party handle these details of the discharge.
- **Listen** - Allow time for the employee to react and raise questions, but do not allow the employee to go on for an extended period. Concern for the employee is natural, but it is important that the supervisor not lose sight of the purpose of the meeting.

Four Typical Responses to Reduction in Force

- The "normal" reaction begins with hurt, anger and disappointment, and then moves on to practical questions. This employee is generally realistic about the situation and is more concerned about what happens next than about the fairness of what has happened and why. **The supervisor should concentrate on giving information and a constructive, action-oriented discussion.**
- The "smooth and controlled" reaction is deceptive and potentially the most dangerous. The employee may be so stunned, his/her ego and self-confidence so damaged, they take the news abnormally well. He/she may act as if
everything is under control, or even as if the news is welcomed. The supervisor needs to ask enough questions to make sure that the employee understands what is happening and that he/she is actually hearing the bad news.

- Hurt and distress characterize the "shock" reaction. The supervisor must take the time to discuss the employee's feelings. He/she must not rush the discussion, but should not allow the employee to dwell too long on their feelings. Move on from this the discussion into plans for action.
- The "violent" reaction is angry, noisy and sometimes scary. The employee may threaten to "get back at" the supervisor or University. The supervisor's best bet is to remain composed and avoid getting defensive. The employee should be allowed to vent, up to a point. If the situation appears to be getting out of hand, the supervisor should not hesitate to call for help.

Anticipated Reactions of the Employee

It is valuable for the supervisor to have an understanding of what reactions may emerge. Most people react with what is best termed as "passive acceptance." It is important that the supervisor not be left uncertain or probing in the face of the employee's response. Control should be maintained. The following are other reactions that may be encountered:

**Grief** - Termination can represent shocking and saddening news. It is not surprising to see the employee cry. To assure that the person is in a proper state to listen to what the supervisor is saying, it may be necessary to allow a few minutes for him/her to regain composure. A greater show of concern on the supervisor's part will only weaken his/her posture.

**Anger** - If the employee is indignant or incensed, the danger exists of the meeting turning into a shouting match. Although it may be difficult to maintain composure in the face of an angry worker, the supervisor must serve as the force of reason. A business-like, rational tone must prevail. An argument will only escalate tension and ill will.

**Disbelief** - If the employee seems stunned and silent, there may be a question as to how much of what is being said is being absorbed. A patient but firm approach usually is the most effective.

The supervisor cannot allow himself/herself to be incapacitated or moved off course by the employee's reaction. Although it is natural for the supervisor to want to make the meeting as painless as possible, "playing the games" with the employee, whether it involves commiseration or a defensive rebuttal, only acknowledges and validates the reaction, giving the employee license to continue in a highly emotional state. The best plan is to be short to the point and very formal. No sign of extended sympathy or feelings of remorse should be shown by the supervisor. This is totally business, and personal feelings should not come into play.
Although the supervisor is not likely to conduct the meeting according to a prepared script, he/she should have a firm idea of what will be said and how to say it. The employee's reaction should not steer the supervisor from saying all that needs to be said, or prompt the supervisor into saying more than he/she should.

If all the necessary details have been attended to before the meeting, the supervisor should embark on the meeting with a sense of assurance. At the meeting's end, when the supervisor announces that a representative of the University Human Resources Department would like to speak with the employee, the supervisor can feel that the best was made of an uncomfortable but necessary situation. The supervisor will feel relieved and glad that both the employee and the University were effectively served under the circumstances.

Checklist

The supervisor should use this checklist to ensure that they have sufficiently prepared for the Separation Meeting.

1. Do I understand my role as the separation supervisor?
2. Have I prepared:
   o a statement announcing the separation, one which may be repeated if necessary?
   o a statement that gives the reasons for the separation, one that can be clearly understood by the separated employee?
   o a reduction in force letter that describes the reason for separation, and effective date? (copies sent to Human Resources and respective Vice Chancellor)
3. Do I understand how the work transition is to take place?
4. Have I made provisions for the separated employee to clean out his/her workspace at an appropriate time?
5. Do I know how to handle the difficult response?
6. Have arrangements been made with the Human Resources Office to discuss benefits and outplacement services.
8. Complete a Personnel Action Change Form to separate the employee.
APPENDIX A - SAMPLE: Generic Reference Letter

(On University Letterhead)

Date

To Whom It May Concern:

(Full name of employee) has been employed as (job title) at _____________ since (date of employment).

During (first name of employee)'s time at the University of Nebraska at Kearney, (he/she) was responsible for (list basic job duties, special projects and accomplishments).

(First name of employee)'s technical knowledge and background include (list information from personal knowledge and resume).

Like many businesses, we have recently reassessed our organizational structure, and it has been determined that it is necessary to reduce our current workforce. Thus, (first name of employee)'s position has been eliminated, effective (date of RIF).

It is our sincere hope that you will give (first name of employee)'s application every consideration.

We wish (him/her) well in (his/her) future endeavors, and thank you for your consideration of (him/her) as a potential employee of your business.

Sincerely,

Name
Title
When the Dust Settles
Managing the survivors of major organizational change

Managing the survivors of the recent wave of organizational restructurings poses one of the most difficult challenges facing the human resources community. The experience of having gone through a major organizational upheaval frequently creates in remaining employees’ new perceptions about their organizations and careers. These new frames of reference must be recognized and understood if the survivors are to be integrated productively into the new organization.

Stated simply, once the dust has settled i.e. restructuring has been completed, the new campus structure has been announced and the players are in place - it is dangerous to assume survivors are "on board" and unchanged by the disruption. The changes often leave pronounced and lingering effects. Human resources and supervisors will be expected to understand these effects and develop appropriate action plans for the management team.

What is may not be for long

Many survivors are likely to feel great uncertainty and lack confidence in the ability of the campus to retain its existing form over the long term. If a major change occurred once, it can happen again.

Being restructured can create the feeling of "moving ground" as familiar faces disappear, cultural expectations undergo change, and there is a lack of organizational history and predictability. The effects of this experience do not disappear simply because top management issues internal memoranda and public statements announcing "refocused strategic objectives." For a survivor experiencing increased skepticism about the continuities of organizational life, today's "refocused strategic objectives" may be seen as the reasons for tomorrow's reorganization.

Loyalty to whom?

There has been much discussion in recent years about the decline in employee loyalty. Some have attributed this decline to the "me" generation of the 1980's where the attitude is "I do what's best for me and look out for number one." It can be argued, however, that this declining loyalty also may result from the perception that mutual obligations and commitments underlying the concept have been breached by businesses.

Survivors are ripe for this line of reasoning and the temptations offered for
making a move. The departure of colleagues and the demise of the organization as one knew it are likely to create the perception that the University has failed to live up to its end of the deal (i.e., being there, being fair and being somewhat predictable).

Is this what I want to be doing?

Some survivors are likely to go through a period of introspection in which they question previously unchallenged assumptions about their careers and personal priorities. This is most likely to occur when the organizational change has been accompanied by widespread personnel reductions and an atmosphere of waiting for the other shoe to drop.

Individuals who believe they have options outside the corporation may begin to pursue these in earnest after the dust settles. Survival is fine, the reasoning goes, but getting more control of one's fate is even better.

Implications for management

Supervisors in the newly created organizations can take a number of actions to minimize these effects and to secure greater commitment from the survivors.

Recognize the Existence of the New Perceptions: Acknowledging that survivors may be experiencing some of these effects is smart management, not soft management. It is essential to accept these perceptions as an element of the new reality, to respond to them concretely and not to judge them.

Be Visible and Communicate: The best way for supervisors to provide stability and reduce the "moving ground" feeling are to be visible, to listen to what is on employees' minds, and to communicate - make that over communicate - about the business. This can be carried out on a one-to-one, informal basis and in more structured formal sessions. Supervisors should seize every opportunity to talk about the directions the University is taking and the state of the campus.

One caveat should be noted here: The easy way to communicate with employees is through memos, newsletters and bulletins about University performance. This is fine, but it is not enough. Commitment among survivors will not be built in this impersonal and bureaucratic way.

Survivors may be skeptical of a top management style characterized by distance from the concerns and experiences of the employees on the front lines. In return for their commitment, they will want to feel connected to visible and responsible decision makers.

Create a Sense of Purpose: It is axiomatic that employees want to see connections between what they do and their campus' overall game plan. This
need is likely to be felt even more strongly by survivors. The sense of drifting does not disappear entirely when the dust settles. Supervisors must refocus energies quickly by explicitly translating the University's strategy and purpose into objectives for individual work units.

**Nourish In-House Talent:** The desire felt by many survivors to exert more control over their careers can be met through the creation of internal opportunities. In particular, career development planning should be pursued.

Commitment to effective career planning programs can help to create a sense of direction for survivors. The fact that the new organization is frequently leaner and flatter than its predecessor does not preclude professional development and career progress. In fact, leaner and flatter organizations frequently bring with them expanded jobs for some survivors. The point is that paying attention to career planning can have a significant payoff if some of the most marketable survivors begin to feel that the grass is not necessarily greener elsewhere.
After Downsizing - How to Rebuild

James W. Buttimer of Arthur D. Little, Inc., from December 1988 Boardroom Reports

For the thousand of companies that have suffered the pain of downsizing, it's time to map out ways to ensure that the pain was not endured for naught. By failing to follow up with plans for renewed growth, companies run the risk of . . .

Losing good people - those who survived the restructuring - because they fail to see where the University is headed.

Letting old habits creep back in: Adding layers of people, duplicating functions, etc. The University gradually loses its edge again - in an environment that is far less tolerant of the inefficient.

Rules for rebuilding . . .

Pay more attention to the remaining workforce. Essential: As the University trims back it needs people with a broader range of skills at every level from hourly workers on up. Middle supervisors who are excellent at their rigidly defined specialties, but who close themselves off from the rest of University operations, aren't helpful in a lean, highly productive operation.

Start with more careful recruiting. After downsizing, the University should be much more selective than it was in the past. The luxury of hiring bright people and seeing what they can do and who survives is a thing of the past. Instead, you need top people to handle major responsibility.

Next, cultivate new skills in employees. Move them around among departments and job functions. The value of such lateral transferring is new to many supervisors, though it has always been a key part of the success of the best-run corporations. One of Procter & Gamble's many great strengths is its low-cost, high-quality production. Key to the training: Young people brought into production are usually rotated through two staff functions during their first five to seven years with the company, so that they can see how the company's "internal customers" react to what's done in production.

Share the scaled-down resources. Companies that strip away unnecessary jobs must guard against the inevitable creep-back. As soon as the dust settles from downsizing, supervisors will start to argue their need for "specialists" on their own turf to get the job done. Don't give in. It's always more efficient for supervisors to share secretarial, clerical, data processing and other key services with each other.

Use ad hoc task forces to solve especially tough problems. Defense companies use what they call Tiger Teams of seasoned supervisors on an ad hoc basis to solve critical problems - such as a lagging production schedule on a vital production system.
Drawback: Experienced supervisors are often entrenched in old habits and bureaucratic methods of getting things done. That stymies efforts to solve important problems.

New Idea: Ad hoc teams of younger supervisors. Ask senior supervisors from all involved departments to recommend the best and the brightest to serve on the team - under the direction of a top supervisor. The younger supervisors get access to other parts of the University, get a broad view of how the University operates and often come up with innovative solutions that elude senior supervisors who have become fixed in their positions.

**Be serious and consistent about improving communications among survivors of the downsizing.** After downsizing, the survivors are armed - ready to fight. They're worried and often bitter about what's happened to their co-workers and their campus. These feelings may not be out in the open, but they're real nevertheless.

Pep talks and memos won't rebuild trust and loyalty. You can't give lip service to employees who have been through a major restructuring. Management's aim must be to create new excitement about the future of the University and to make survivors realize that they're extremely important parts of that future. Stronger personal ties between management and workers are called for in a post-downsizing environment, to re-establish stability and security.

Example: In one University, a senior vice president began inviting small groups of employees to dinner at a good restaurant once a month. He encouraged them to be open about what was going on in the University, what they liked and didn't like, what they would change. The first groups were very reticent. But as the dinners continued and it became evident to the guests that the supervisor was eager to respond to their suggestions with action, rather than just words, communication blossomed. Problems were solved and the dinners began to play a role in rebuilding University spirit.

**Bolster the reward system and make it apply to everyone.** Incentive programs won't work if they're limited to a small group of supervisors at the top. And don't limit incentives to financial rewards - career development is at least as important as money to most people.