

How to make redundancies... and still come out as the good guy

Reducing staff numbers is one of the hardest jobs a manager has to do. When you've got to know your team, having to single some of them out to tell them they no longer have a job can be really tough. But it doesn't have to be all doom and gloom. Follow these tips and you'll come through the other side with your employees' respect intact.

- **Have a sound business reason for making reductions** – the stronger your argument, the easier it will be for your team to understand and accept
- **Communicate** fully and regularly with your team, as a group, individually and in writing, even with individuals you know are not likely to lose their job. From the employee's perspective, no news is NOT good news.
- **Involve your employees.** They may well think of alternatives that you didn't. Don't assume that they don't understand your big picture, you may be surprised at some of the great suggestions you receive to avoid job losses.
- **Listen.** Even to daft ideas that you know will never work. Even to angry rants. Even to questions you think you've already answered (you probably need to re-phrase the answer)
- **Never use redundancy as an excuse** to weed out poor performers. If people aren't performing well, you should be managing them through an entirely different process. Redundancy is an easy cop-out that's likely to land you in a tribunal with an employee who doesn't believe there is a fair answer to "why me?"
- **Never make promises you're not 100% certain you can keep.** This is the quickest way to lose respect and trust and will jeopardise the whole process.
- **Don't throw money at the problem.** If your policy is to pay statutory redundancy, pay statutory redundancy. A little extra money isn't going to make the problem go away and won't last long when the employee has no job to go to. And you'll leave everyone else wondering how many jobs could have been saved, how much their lives could have been made easier, if money hadn't been wasted on what looks like easing your guilty conscience.
- **Focus on the future.** If money isn't the answer, security certainly is. Businesses can be really proactive in helping redundant employees to find work. It's much more than helping put a cv together – it's inviting recruitment agents in to talk to staff, contacting businesses who might have jobs for them, helping individuals to get through the psychological process of losing their job and moving on. This is the critical part that most businesses forget, yet from the employee's perspective is the most important.
- **Don't forget the people who are staying.** You've just completely changed the dynamic of their team and their work environment. Your remaining team also have a psychological process to go through. They may "grieve" the loss of their colleagues and question their own security. This is a vulnerable time for employees to start looking for work elsewhere. If you want to retain their loyalty to you, they must see that you have treated their colleagues fairly and that you recognise that it's been hard on them too.
- **Seek professional guidance** if you're not confident with doing this yourself. The damage that poorly handled redundancy processes cause can cost your business far more in the long run.

About the author



For the past 10 years, **Chantal Walton** has been Director of HR on Tap Ltd, a business that helps businesses to increase profits through people. She has supported clients through dozens of redundancy and restructure processes in the UK and the EU, ranging from 8 employees to 30,000!

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