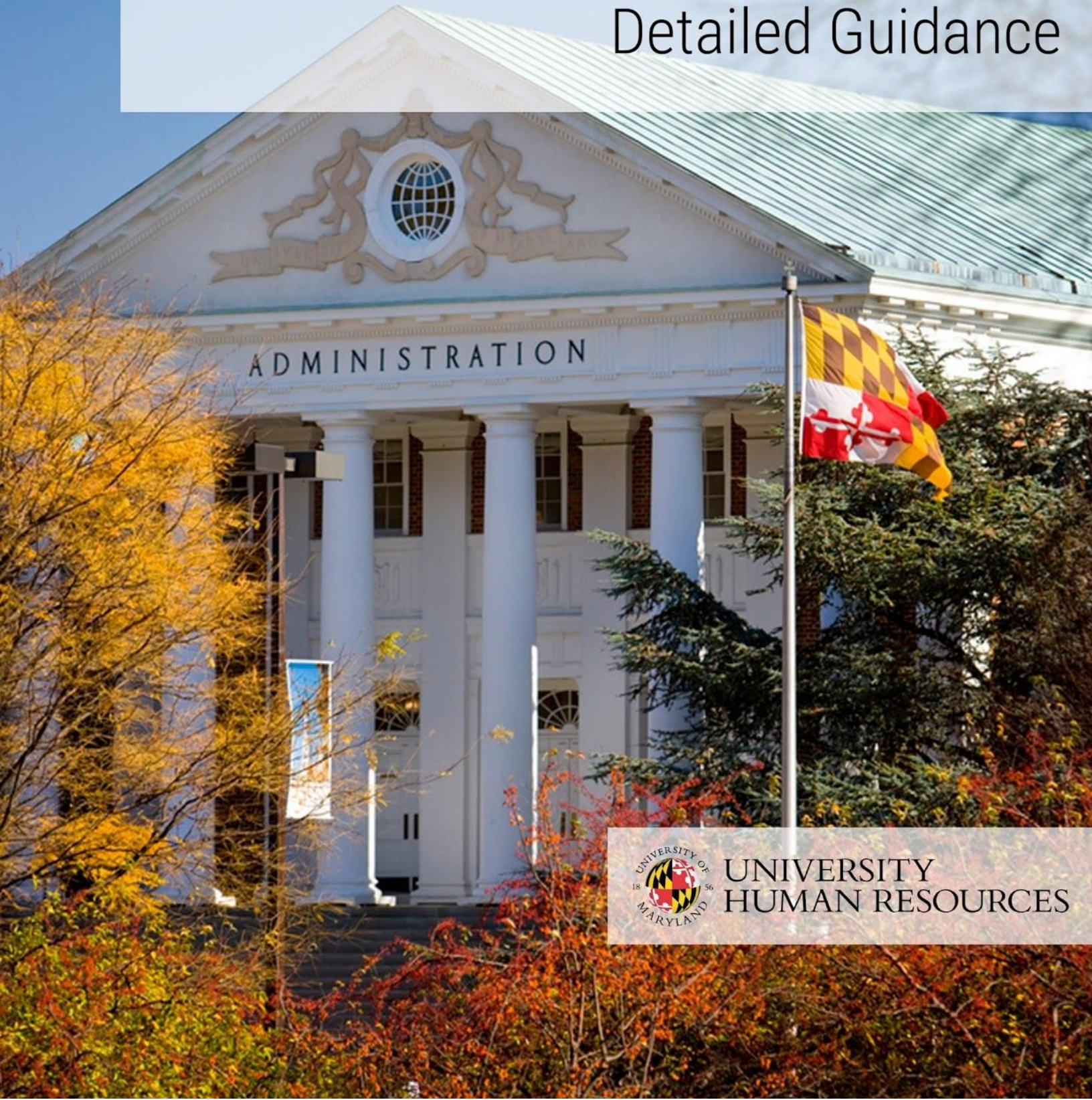


Conducting Layoff Meetings

Detailed Guidance



UNIVERSITY
HUMAN RESOURCES



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Introduction

Telling an employee that their job is being eliminated is, perhaps, one of the most difficult challenges a manager or supervisor may encounter. It is doubly hard for the affected employee to understand this action when they have no control over the decision.

We have developed this guide to help leaders navigate the layoff process with dignity and respect for both the employee who is leaving, and for the employees remaining in the department. We hope you will find this information helpful in managing these changes in your department.

Conducting Layoff Meetings

Informing employees that they are losing their job is a difficult and stressful task for a manager. For the interaction between the employee and the manager or supervisor to go as smoothly as possible, careful preparation and planning are the most important elements.

The objectives of the notification meeting are twofold:

1. To inform the employee that their job has been eliminated and that they are being separated, and
2. To do so in a respectful and dignified manner that keeps the employee feeling positive about the University and helps to begin the transition process in a positive way.

Pre-Meeting Preparation

- **Be familiar with the circumstances** (e.g. lack of funds, lack of work, or department reorganization) leading to the elimination of the employee's position. Also, be familiar with the process that was followed, including how the decision was made in selecting who would be laid off.
- **Prepare a script** or an outline of key points as a guide. This will ensure that you convey all the necessary information to the employee. Practice and rehearse the message you will deliver and how you will deliver it without reading your script word for word.
- **Consult with Staff Relations** if considering the continuation of work during the notice period.

- **Consider how you will handle the employee's work.** Will work be distributed among other employees? Will services be eliminated? Do key clients need to be notified about the change?
- **Be aware** that the separation process can be emotional for all parties, including yourself; prepare for this. Because of the emotional context, it is important to anticipate questions you could be asked and have the answers to those questions available.

Take the time necessary to make the proper arrangements for the notification meeting.

- ✓ If the meeting will occur virtually, ensure you know how to use the technology. If the meeting will occur in person, select a place where you can have privacy.
- ✓ Select a meeting time earlier in the day, on a day that is not immediately prior to a weekend, holiday, or scheduled vacation for either the employee or the manager/supervisor.
- ✓ If possible, schedule the notification meeting for a day that will not coincide with significant known dates for the employee (e.g. family celebrations, religious holiday, employee's birthday, etc.)
- ✓ Plan for uninterrupted time and allow enough time to complete the meeting without being rushed, including time for the employee to ask questions.

Notification Meeting Guidelines

Here are a few pointers for conducting a professional meeting:

- Don't engage in small talk, get to the point. Deliver the message directly but compassionately and allow the employee time to read the written notice of layoff you will give them during this meeting. If the meeting will occur virtually, you can read the key points of the letter to the employee and provide a copy via email and certified mail after the meeting.
- Stick to your talking points and remain calm. Straightforward, clear communication is important.
- Give the employee some background explaining why this decision is necessary. Do not engage in arguments with the employee or seek to provide unnecessary justification for this action.

- Do not make comments, even if well intended, that could compromise the decision. Do not express your personal opinions on the reasons for the layoff or the process. Stay away from discussions that could confuse the primary message.
- Be sensitive to the employee's situation, but also be direct and firm. Make sure that the employee knows the decision is final and is non-negotiable.
- Don't blame others for the actions being taken or criticize the decision that has been made.
- Don't become defensive, argumentative or confrontational.
- Be sensitive to the employee's response. Listening to the employee does not mean you agree with them.
- If necessary, allow an employee who is working on-site a reasonable amount of time to "compose" themselves before having to leave the meeting location and face co-workers.
- Allow the employee to ask questions and let them know they can come back to you with questions later if needed, since it sometimes takes time for an employee to process what they have been told.
- Listen to the employee and exhibit empathy. Some employees may want to ask questions, while others may just want to get the information and end the meeting. Document anything that could lead to a potential problem. Consult with the Office of Staff Relations, if appropriate.
- Avoid any negative body language, e.g. rolling your eyes, appearing bored, checking your watch or email, taking a call or text, or anything that may be construed as being uncaring or unconcerned for the employee's well-being.
- Focus the employee on the next steps in their future. Encourage the employee to contact the resources available (e.g. [Faculty Staff Assistance Program](#), [UHR Employee Benefits](#), etc.).

Managing Employee Reactions

The employee may:

- ✓ Become resistant, defensive and/or threatening, want to plead his/her case, or bargain for another opportunity.
- ✓ Want to speak with a "decision-maker".
- ✓ Ask "Why me?" questions.
- ✓ Threaten a lawsuit or other formal action such as a retaliation complaint.

- ✓ May get personally upset with the manager or supervisor.
- ✓ Try to make the issue personal or about performance.
- ✓ Argue about a person being retained who they believe is less capable, has less seniority, etc.
- ✓ List the repercussions cascading from the job loss.
- ✓ Break down emotionally.
- ✓ Be visibly shocked and unable to accept what is happening.

Be prepared for the following reactions:

If crying occurs:

- ✓ Offer tissues
- ✓ Be supportive and empathetic, but refrain from touching the employee, if meeting in person.
- ✓ Be patient and allow time for the employee to compose themselves.

If anger occurs:

- ✓ Listen. Anger is a normal response.
- ✓ Remain calm and request the employee to remain calm.
- ✓ Do not discuss employee performance issues.
- ✓ Stop the meeting and reconvene at a later time, if needed.

If silence occurs:

- ✓ Acknowledge the silence and ask questions to ensure the employee understands the layoff message.

If denial occurs:

- ✓ Repeat or rephrase statements.
- ✓ Ask questions to determine whether the employee understands the layoff message.
- ✓ Empathize with the employee with statements such as, “I know this is quite a shock” or “This is really hard to understand at first.”
- ✓ Give the employee direction on what he or she needs to do (i.e. read the Layoff Guide, contact UHR’s Employee Benefits).

If threats occur:

- ✓ Don't put yourself between the employee and the door if meeting in person. Give them easy access to leave if necessary.
- ✓ Keep calm, take a deep breath, and do not let yourself get baited into a shouting match.

- ✓ Suggest a brief cool down period, pause and then reconvene when you feel that emotions have calmed, if possible.
- ✓ Contact Public Safety to inform them of your concerns, if needed.

Sample Dialogue with the Employee

The following information may assist in planning a script for the layoff notification meeting as well as in responding to various reactions from the employee. *(The script below is only a suggestion. Modify the script to fit the specific situation.)*

[Manager to employee]

1. Greet the employee.

<i>Manager:</i>	<i>Hello, [Employee Name]. Thank you for meeting with me.</i>
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2. Notification (speak slowly and calmly)

<i>Manager:</i>	<i>I've called this meeting because unfortunately, I must inform you that your position is being eliminated. This means you are being laid off. Here is your official Notice of Layoff.</i>
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Give the letter to the employee and pause to allow them time to read and process the information. If meeting virtually, read the letter to the employee and indicate that you will email the letter and the layoff guide to them immediately following the meeting.

<i>Manager:</i>	<i>As you may know, the University is facing severe budget cuts. Although we've done everything possible to minimize the impact of this situation, we still need to make some very difficult decisions. I'd like you to know that this action is not easily taken and only after long and careful review of many options. It is a final decision.</i>
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(pause for a few seconds)

The employee may have questions at this point. Answer any questions honestly and appropriately.

<i>Manager:</i>	<i>I know this is difficult news. Is everything I've said clear to you? Do you have</i>
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	<i>any questions?</i>
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Appropriate Response to Emotional Reactions

In addition to reactions such as crying, anger, and non-acceptance, emotional responses may also include “why” questions: “Why me?”, “Why not another employee?”, “Why did you make this decision?” Other questions may include:

- ✓ Who made this decision?
- ✓ Who can I talk with to get this decision reversed?
- ✓ Are there any other jobs available for me?
- ✓ Can I keep my job if I take a pay cut or reduce my time?
- ✓ Who else is being released?

Listen carefully and make eye contact with the employee. Assess the employee’s emotional state and/or behavior to see if they might be a threat to themselves or others. If so, following the meeting, contact the Office of Staff Relations for advice. Otherwise, answer those questions that are appropriate to answer. Do not allow the employee to continue too long.

Show empathy for the employee but avoid trite statements such as:

“It’s not the end of the world.”

“Consider this a blessing in disguise.”

“The glass isn’t half empty, it’s half full.”

“It’s just a job.”

If the employee is exhibiting emotional reactions, while you may wish to continue with the meeting, consider what might be best for the employee and whether they will hear any further information you may deliver at this time. In most cases, you should take the time to deal with the emotional reactions and responses of the employee before turning to any transition matters you need to deal with.

<i>Manager:</i>	<i>Is there someone I can call for you? (If the employee is working on-site)</i>
<i>-or-</i>	<i>Would you like to take a brief break before we continue?</i>
<i>-or-</i>	<i>Would you like to leave/stop working for the rest of the day and we can continue this discussion tomorrow?</i>

Transition Matters

<i>Manager:</i>	<i>At this point, I need to discuss with you how you will leave the department and the resources and assistance the University makes available to you.</i>
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This transition statement will reinforce that the action being taken is final and will begin moving the employee forward in that direction. Again, make eye contact with the employee and speak calmly.

It will be important to have clear instructions for the following:

- Arrangements with the employee to come to campus to retrieve his/her belongings and who will be present when the employee comes to do this.
- Returning campus property such as laptop, cell phone, ID cards, etc.
- Confirm who will be following up with him/her regarding any questions or concerns that were addressed in the meeting.

If the staff person will be allowed/required to work after the notification meeting, it will be important to discuss the following:

- Confirm last date of work.
- Confirm basic information about work expectations during the time the person will be working (i.e. key projects, due dates, etc). Use your judgment about how much detail to discuss at this time: most employees will be focused on the notification. You should schedule a follow up meeting in a few days to go into detail about expectations.
- Encourage the staff member to make an appointment with UHR's [Office of Employee Benefits](#) to discuss any benefits issues, especially related to enrolling in COBRA for health insurance.

Notifying Remaining Employees

Every employee is affected by layoffs in their department. This section offers some steps managers can take with remaining employees after layoffs have occurred.

Once layoff notifications are complete, it is a good idea for you to meet with the retained employees to tell them of the layoffs as soon as possible. Some guidelines:

- Choose a location that will be private and uninterrupted

- Make every effort to have all retained employees present
- Allow for at least a half-hour

Step 1: At the meeting

Let the remaining employees know that layoff notices have been given. Do not share any specific information about the individuals laid off.

Sample opening language:

<i>Manager:</i>	<i>I have some difficult news to share with all of you. As you know, we have been asked to respond to the University's significant budget situation. Unfortunately, this has meant that we had to implement layoffs in our department. Jobs have been eliminated and as a result, # people will be leaving the organization. They have all been informed. I know that you have questions and reactions to what I've said. Let me pause now and see what questions you may have.</i>
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Step 2: Handling employee reactions

Be prepared for any of the following statements or questions. Even if the staff do not ask these questions, you might want to offer the information.

- How was it decided that layoffs are necessary?
- How are the laid off people doing?
- How many people in the department lost their jobs?
- When will their last day be?
- What will happen to their work?
- What should we say to anyone calling for a specific employee who has been laid off?
- How are we planning to say goodbye?
- I'm too busy to assume the employee's work!

Step 3: Discussing next steps

Let your employees know what the next few days will look like. Communication is essential, and it will be important for you to set up one-on-one time to check in with every employee, as far as possible. Depending on the nature of the terminating employee's role, there may be some immediate next steps that will require you and your work team's attention, e.g., phone coverage, the following day's schedule, and work reassignments.

Explain that you are establishing a temporary plan to accomplish work through the transition period so that essential workflow is uninterrupted.

Sample language:

<i>Manager:</i>	<i>Have I answered most of your questions? If so, I'd like to make certain that, over the next few days, we'll have our bases covered in light of [person's] transition. I have some ideas about a few items, but would like to hear what you're thinking too..."</i>
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Take care of essential business only. Then, schedule a follow-up meeting (ideally within 3-4 days) with staff, individually or in small groups, to talk about work redistribution, roles and future direction of your area in light of the staff reduction.

Moving Forward After Layoffs

Your ability to communicate effectively and regularly with your staff after the layoffs will prove invaluable in the long term. People may show signs of anxiety, lack of commitment, and even a decrease in productivity and creativity. In the weeks and months that follow a layoff or reorganization, strong leadership strategies are required to help employees focus on the priorities at hand and to recommit themselves to the organization. Your leadership will be key in helping staff to recognize and deal with their emotions. Listen well and often.

Some specific suggestions:

- Hold regular meetings with staff
- Ask how people are doing and be prepared to listen and respond empathetically
- Ask what “rumors” are out there and either validate or dispel
- Check-in one on one more often
- Set clear, realistic, and attainable short-term goals
- Stay focused on the work of the department
- Establish/continue an open-door policy
- Let staff know that they should come directly to you with questions, concerns, and information

Keeping employees engaged

All of the steps listed above can be helpful in keeping the remaining employees informed and engaged. Other things to keep in mind include the following:

Embody respect

In organizations where there have been layoffs, fear can undermine daily work and lead to loss of productivity. There may be gossip, rumors, and lots of lost time. People may begin to see colleagues as competitors, eroding the collegiality and spirit in your group.

The best way to embody respect for employees is to be honest and straightforward with them.

- Don't hide the truth; employees want and deserve to know what's going on.
- Don't offer false guarantees or try to sugar-coat the current reality.
- Communicating respectfully also includes telling employees when you don't know the answers to their questions or concerns.
- Communicate regularly, keeping them up-to-date on changes and expectations.
- Involve them in key decisions to the extent possible.
- Ask your staff questions.
- Ask for their ideas.
- Ask them what they need and what they want from you. Even if you can't accommodate them, asking shows that you care.

Reduce stress and anxiety through modeling

Especially during uncertain or difficult times, it is important to remember that you can only control what you can control. Worrying about what is going to happen will only result in more worrying and stress.

You can be an example for your employees by staying positive, upbeat and focused on the work. Demonstrate for your employees that you are in control of yourself and your emotions.

- Avoid the rumor mill and ask your employees to do so as well.
- Encourage them to bring rumors to your attention.
- Encourage them to focus on what they CAN control – getting plenty of rest, taking care of their health, staying focused on their jobs and finding ways to have some fun – both at work and in their off hours.
- All of these are ways to reduce stress.

Common Reactions

Employees who remain in the organization (yourself included) will experience a wide range of emotional reactions to the reduction in workforce. These reactions run the gamut of emotions typical of grief: denial, shock, bargaining, anger, and finally acceptance. It is important to

consider each individual separately when dealing with employees during this time. Experts refer to many of these reactions as the “Survivor Syndrome.”

Fear, Insecurity, and Uncertainty

People are anxious about the future of their own jobs and are fearing “Who’s next?” As a result, there may be an increased self-absorption and a focus on job security where people begin to care less about the future of the organization. Some people who are feeling really scared may choose to work long hours, thinking that the harder they work, the less likely for the organization to take away their jobs. Some experience confusion about their future role. There may be a tendency to avoid risk taking due to skepticism around why certain people were let go and why they were retained.

Unfairness, Distrust, and Betrayal

Some may question the credibility of senior management. Others may believe that managers made poor choices in terms of who stayed and who left. Research has shown that perceptions of the “fairness” of a workforce reduction process tend to influence retained employees’ commitment to an organization. Others may not feel safe enough to openly express these emotions within their organization. However, the suppression of these emotions can create further problems. It may be argued that the feelings openly expressed aren’t the ones you really need to worry about. It is the unspoken resentment and lack of trust that must be addressed. Trust can be diminished among co-workers and people may become suspicious of management and one another.

Sadness, Depression, and Guilt

Employees are drained and just want it to be over. Some may experience poor health and sleeplessness. Others may experience decreased motivation to work hard. (They perceived that their co-workers worked hard, put many hours in, and “Look what happened to them.”) Some may feel guilty about retaining their jobs while their friends are forced to look for other positions.

Others may mask feelings of sadness, stress, helplessness and guilt in order to fit in. They may demonstrate false group bravado or may “hang tough” after a workforce reduction.

Frustration, Resentment, and Anger

Anger is an appropriate feeling for an employee to have. Some retained employees may even feel envious of the people who were terminated. There may be a perception that people

received generous layoff packages and were helped to find new jobs. Some may feel resentful of any new work they must now assume from displaced workers.

Continuing Commitment

Some team members may believe that tough actions have been taken and the organization is now on a painful, but clear road toward recovery. Not all responses are negative. Some may even feel “charged up,” finding new excitement in their work, challenged by the prospect of “doing more with less,” or saving the organization. This may exist particularly where it looks like the organization is heading in a new direction.

Whatever the reactions that you and your remaining employees face, it is important for the manager to model good communication skills and to reach out for assistance in helping the team to recover and stay focused. Available resources include:

- [Faculty Staff Assistance Program](#) - 301-314-8170
- Office of Staff Relations – 301-405-0100



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