



AFTER THE LAYOFF

How to Support Remaining Employees



After the Layoff

Layoffs can create fear and doubt among employees, lower morale, and reduce their trust in you as an employer. You may wonder how to [support remaining employees after a layoff](#) and keep them engaged. How can you motivate your workforce and maintain loyalty after their colleagues depart your organization?

Support for your remaining employees can take many forms. It begins with transparent communication, continues with helping them manage the changes both in practical and emotional terms, and carries into the future as you listen and respond to concerns. In this guide, we'll show you how to assist your workforce to help them be resilient through change, be optimistic, and look forward to their futures as part of your team through the following sections:

- **Communicating Layoffs to Remaining Employees.** Learn the four steps you should take to reduce the negative impact of layoffs to your workforce, including when to hold meetings, what information to share, and what to expect.
- **Helping Your Employees Navigate Change.** Learn how to support your employees' emotional and professional well-being, address increased workloads and changing responsibilities, train management, and promote growth.
- **Motivating Your Remaining Workforce.** Learn how to demonstrate your appreciation for your employees through recognition, career development opportunities, and more.
- **Listening and Responding.** Learn how to create a routine process of listening, including regular check-ins and surveys, and responding with appropriate actions, in order to facilitate ongoing improvement and provide employees with a sense of being heard.



Communicating Layoffs to Remaining Employees

When HR professionals talk about communicating layoffs, the discussion generally centers around breaking the news to departing employees.

Letting someone know they no longer have a job is no easy task, which is why there are guides and webinars on compassionate offboarding abound to help HR professionals navigate these talks.



However, it's just as important for companies to carefully consider how they are communicating layoffs to remaining employees. These employees also experience difficult emotions, such as fear about job security, sadness and anger over the loss of friends and colleagues, and anxiety over a new reporting structure. Moreover, they generally have to make a number of adjustments post-layoff, such as taking on additional duties and learning how to perform new tasks. Since the retained employees are the people who will play a key role in the organization's future success, companies should take steps towards managing these relationships, getting buy-in on company goals, rebuilding trust, and boosting morale.

Here are four steps you can take to communicate layoffs to remaining employees.

1 Hold meetings with remaining employees

In the same way you plan and conduct offboarding meetings with employees who are being laid off, organize meetings with the retained employees to keep them in the loop about the workforce changes. Otherwise, these workers will be left to speculate about what's happening and wonder if they too will be let go.

Lack of information fuels layoff anxiety, which a remarkable 48% of American workers experience, according to INTOO's 2019 Layoff Anxiety Study.

When employees are anxious and fearful about losing their jobs, productivity and loyalty goes down. By holding meetings and clearly communicating information about the layoffs to remaining employees, you can forestall layoff anxiety and its effects.

Your company can choose to hold one big meeting of retained employees, or arrange a number of smaller group meetings, depending on the needs of your workforce. In either case, consider using a script so you don't forget any important details, and hold the meeting as soon as possible, preferably on the same day as the affected employees are informed, before rumors have a chance to begin.



Communicating Layoffs to Remaining Employees (cont.)



2 Share facts about the layoff

Why the layoff is taking place. Layoffs are usually part of larger business decisions, such as mergers, acquisitions, or strategy changes. When communicating layoffs to remaining employees, make sure to share with them what these decisions are, and if possible, why they were made. Is customer demand lower than expected? Is the company stock underperforming? Are there unexpected changes in the sector or the economy as a whole? By giving employees a reason for the layoff, you'll be able to convey the sense that the layoffs were a business necessity.

How many people were affected. Was just a single person laid off—or were whole departments let go? Give your employees a clear sense of the scope of the layoff.

Who was affected. People will see soon enough which of their colleagues are no longer around, so it's a good idea to share the names of the people who are leaving in this initial meeting. If the total number of people laid off by the company is relatively large, smaller meetings by department or role might be better venues for sharing information specific to that group.

How layoff decisions were made. Some of your retained employees may develop survivor's guilt about having kept their jobs while others were let go. For this reason, unless there are legal issues keeping you from sharing this information, you might consider detailing how the layoff selection was made. If, for example, your company made a decision to let go of the newest hires, it might help your employees feel that decisions were made in a fair and unbiased manner.

Communicating Layoffs to Remaining Employees (cont.)

What benefits were provided to affected employees.

Since laid-off employees were colleagues and are friends of the employees you retain, it's important to show your remaining workforce that the departing employees were treated well and supported on their way out. If your company provided severance packages for affected employees, share that information with your retained workforce, who will likely be relieved to find out their friends were given support such as severance pay, continued health coverage, and outplacement services to help them find a new job quickly and easily.

How remaining employees will be supported through the changes.

After layoffs, those remaining may wonder if they'll be under pressure to make up for their departed colleagues' outputs and whether they will have any future opportunities for growth with the company. Address how management plans to guide their team members through the changes to help them create a strategy for the coming months. Addressing their stress and listening to concerns will help them to feel that you are partnering with them in order to move forward.

How the layoff will help the company move forward. While layoffs are difficult to go through, organizations perform them in order to put them in a better position to succeed in the future. Share with your employees the positive results you anticipate as a result of the workforce changes so your retained employees can feel they're working towards a common goal.

At the same time, avoid making any promises or guarantees. Your remaining employees will naturally want to know if additional layoffs are planned. Be honest about your company's current situation. If the outlook is uncertain, communicate that fact without sugarcoating it, as the truth will likely be better than the worst of your employees' fears. If there are no further layoffs planned, reassure your employees of this fact to assuage unnecessary fears.

Depending on your company's specific situation, you may not cover all of these points. But do communicate with your employees about the layoffs as much as possible. For most people, the fear of the unknown conjures up much scarier scenarios than reality; sharing pertinent information can allay unnecessary fears when communicating layoffs to employees.

Communicating Layoffs to Remaining Employees (cont.)

3 Allow for questions

Inevitably, your employees will have questions about the layoff. Some may be emotional ones (“How could you do this to people?”), while others more practical (“Will offices be reassigned?”). Be prepared for both, and learn about [how to handle emotions at work](#) when communicating layoffs to employees. Be sure to give truthful and transparent answers, as that will help your company regain its employees’ trust.

4 Clarify changes in duties

Layoffs change the shape of an organization, often shifting the reporting structure. In addition, layoffs often require companies to reshuffle workloads, so the retained workforce can take over duties that used to be performed by laid-off employees. When communicating layoffs to remaining employees, clarify what changes have been made to the reporting structure, how individual workloads will change, and what the new expectations are.





Helping Your Employees Navigate Change

When a company conducts a layoff, a lot of attention is given to the employees who are leaving the company. They are, after all, the ones who have lost their jobs. However, retained employees also have to adjust to many changes, which is why it's vital for HR professionals to consider how to motivate employees after layoffs. Even for those who welcome the changes, the adjustment period can be challenging.

If your remaining employees are preoccupied with negative emotions about the layoff, their productivity will suffer. Some may even follow in the footsteps of the laid-off employees and choose to leave the company, especially if they believe more layoffs are coming, or feel their new work conditions are untenable. And as [SHRM](#) points out, one employee leaving a company can trigger more departures—a phenomenon known as turnover contagion. This kind of talent departure can add on an additional challenge during an already-delicate time of transition.

If you're an HR professional concerned about how to motivate employees after layoffs, here are some concrete actions you can take to engage and support the members of your workforce.



Facilitate workshops to help leaders and teams effectively manage change

Demonstrate that you, as an employer, understand the challenges your remaining employees are facing and that you wish to smooth the transition as much as possible. As an example, you can support an agile workforce by providing resilience workshops for both managers and team members. Such workshops can offer strategies to strengthen one's personal resilience, as well as that within a team, so that those within a department can [work together to overcome any adversities presented by change](#).

Sometimes employees may not realize that they have the tools within themselves to persist after a layoff or other unexpected event.

Offering a chance to learn about themselves and resilience resources can help them trust in their abilities and also value you as a caring employer.

Schedule one-on-one meetings

While we've discussed the importance of communicating with your employees after layoffs in a group setting, it's as important that you continue to communicate one-on-one with members of your workforce. While group sessions are helpful for delivering the same message to everyone at the same time, personal meetings allow employees to ask questions they may not want to ask in a group setting. They also allow you to get a better insight into how the employee is feeling and can trigger more open and honest conversations.

Acknowledge emotions

Because layoffs make for an emotionally tumultuous time, it's important to take steps to recognize the feelings of your remaining workers. Retained employees may feel sad about losing colleagues, angry about company decisions, and fearful of future layoffs. They may even feel survivor's guilt at having kept their jobs while others lost theirs. In addition, employees usually see their work duties shift, change, or grow. They may need to take on bigger workloads, learn to perform new tasks, or change offices to start working with new people in the case of a merger or acquisition. Any and all of these emotions can lead to overwhelm, which can get in the way of productivity, engagement and retention.



According to [Fast Company](#), the first step to allow people to share their thoughts and feelings is to demonstrate that emotions are acceptable at the workplace. Leaders should show this by example: “They can share their feelings when speaking by expressing their joys and fears. In writing, they can sprinkle their message with emotional words to show they have feelings like the rest of us. This will bring leaders closer to their staff and go a long way towards establishing trust.”

By allowing employees to express their emotions, you'll encourage a healthier workplace during the difficult transition time after a layoff and beyond.



Helping Your Employees Navigate Change (cont.)

It may be that everything that used to get done at your company prior to layoffs can no longer be completed by the reduced workforce. If this is the case, help your employees prioritize. Be clear about the needs that are crucial, and identify the duties that can be delayed or eliminated.

Don't overburden survivors

Often, after a layoff, remaining employees are asked to take on more work. A job that used to be done by three people may now be done just by one. In such cases, it's helpful to work with the retained employees to set reasonable expectations. The first step is to get a clear picture of the workload on each employee's plate. If the spread is uneven, you may need to shift tasks to even things out.

In addition, remaining employees may need to acquire new skills and knowledge if their jobs have expanded to include additional duties. If your company doesn't provide adequate support to nurture this learning, the circumstances can lead to overwhelm, especially during an emotionally difficult time. Offer career development as needed—including the time needed for that growth.



Motivating Your Remaining Workforce

After layoffs occur in an organization, the entire workforce is impacted. Employees that continue to work at the company need to carry on in their roles as usual, but without some of their friends and colleagues. For this reason, productivity and morale can decline after a reduction in force.

If you're worried about improving productivity after reducing the workforce, there may be some things you can do to help it along.



Motivating Your Remaining Workforce (cont.)



Show your employees you value them

Although employees that remain after a layoff are clearly retained because the company sees value in their work, retained workers often feel unimportant in the eyes of the company in the aftermath of a layoff. After all, they just saw their coworkers dismissed from the organization. After seeing the exodus, remaining employees may feel similarly disposable.

For this reason, companies must take steps to make employees feel valued after a layoff. Let them know how vital they are to reaching your company's business goals, post-layoff. Highlight what you expect the company changes will do. The idea is to get buy-in from all your employees on these larger aims to cultivate a culture where all members of the company feel they're working toward a common goal.

To this end, you might consider holding regular check-ins with each employee to open the communication lines and learn about their individual workplace concerns to try to address them. This is an important ongoing management practice. As Inc. notes, "one of the best ways to show your employees you appreciate them is making the time to connect with them. Find out how they're doing—including their lives outside work."



Motivating Your Remaining Workforce (cont.)

Your company might also consider perks to improve morale and reduce office tensions, such as offering retained employees a paid day off to unwind from the emotions brought up by the layoff, or providing a catered meal during the often-busy time post-layoff. You can also show appreciation by providing new opportunities that allow employees to showcase and use their skills, employee awards or recognitions, and even promotions.

Last but not least, thank your workers. Just as an employer chooses who goes and who remains in the case of a layoff, the retained employee can choose whether to stay with your company or go to another. Show gratitude for the decision they've made to remain through these difficult times, and for the work they'll do to get the company through.

Offer career development opportunities

Those who are left behind after a layoff may worry that they will lack career opportunities with your organization going forward. The best way to respond to those concerns is to offer opportunities for career growth. Even while making cuts to maintain profitability, there are cost-effective solutions to help your team with [career development](#).

You can increase engagement within your workforce by giving them a path for growth with career coaching, upskilling and reskilling courses, mentorships, and transparency around available opportunities within your organization. Providing ways to employees to increase their knowledge, skills, and experience with you can not only motivate them but also help them better respond and adapt to future challenges and changes within the company. Expanding the diversity of knowledge within your organization will also help create an agile workforce that will ensure you rebound faster after any future disruptions.

Listening and Responding

Survey employees to understand their concerns and priorities

While it's a reasonable expectation that employees will be worried about their job security and the future of the company after layoffs, they likely have additional concerns that are more specific to their roles or departments. [Surveys](#) are a way to not only uncover what your employees are thinking about, but also to show that you are listening and care about their opinions and interests.



As with the layoff communications, be transparent when presenting the survey to your workforce to explain why it's being offered and how the responses will be used. It's then important that you share the results with employees and take steps to respond to their concerns and needs, whether that means making improvements and/or changes or holding meetings with them to find solutions.

Check in with employees to address and prevent burnout

The elimination of roles at a company can add to remaining employees' responsibilities and workloads and create [burnout](#). Since you want to be able to retain your existing workforce, it's important to frequently check in with them at the organizational, departmental, and individual level. Immediately following a layoff will be an adjustment period, where those affected may require time to adapt to new responsibilities and/or learn new skills and/or processes. It's important to [support remaining employees](#) through these challenges by asking them what they need to be successful during the transition and providing them tools, such as training and mentorship, or flexibility around work schedules.

Managers may end up with additional direct reports and will also need support, whether that means redistribution of some of their responsibilities, or help with prioritizing projects in order to achieve goals without exhausting themselves and their resources.

Maintain a steady frequency of listening

While some organizations are effective at listening and responding to employees' concerns immediately following a reduction in force, unfortunately, for others their efforts dwindle as time goes on. In order to maintain motivation and loyalty, practices such as those listed above should be part of a company's standard procedures for managing its workforce.





The Takeaway

Layoffs will always create some challenges for a company after they occur. However, by implementing support strategies for your remaining employees, such as the ones listed above, you can mitigate the negative impacts and help your workforce move forward.

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Layoff Best Practices & Guides

Layoffs are never easy. For additional guidance and best practices on conducting layoffs, here is some suggested reading:

- Reference our [Reduction In Force \(RIF\) Checklist](#) to be sure you don't miss an important step in the RIF process.
- When laying off employees, it's important to be prepared. Download our [Layoff Notification Meeting Guide and Script: What to Say and What NOT to Say](#).
- Understand best practices around severance with [The Complete Guide to Severance Packages](#).

