

# Hiring and Firing

**H**iring or firing an employee is a challenging, emotional experience and a pathway to possible lawsuits. The decision to employ or terminate someone will influence you, that individual, his or her family, your team, your customers, and your stakeholders. It is normal to experience strong emotions when making these decisions, emotions that may hinder your ability to make effective decisions and perhaps edge you inadvertently into saying or doing some things that are illegal.

To reduce the emotional trauma and to be more effective in hiring and firing people, try these time-tested strategies.

## INVOLVE HUMAN RESOURCES

The people in your Human Resources (HR) department are your best friends in these situations. Talk with them before doing anything. Invite them to review your ideas before you take action.

And have them with you in the room when you do act. If you do not have an HR department, then involve your attorney. Either one will provide a calming and rational influence. No matter how experienced you are, your HR professional or attorney has

seen more and stranger things than you have and is trained to deal with them.

In my experience, these professionals would love to be more involved, if only to see that the interests of all parties—the employer and the employee—are protected. In addition,

description in place for each position in your organization. Have a list of standard interview questions for each job in your organization. Send copies of those questions to HR for review before starting to use them, and ask HR to have your legal department

review them as well. Have standard procedures drawn up for how each candidate is interviewed, including the interview starting time and who will attend.

Document in writing each step of the hiring process for every candidate. But be certain you do not inadvertently put anything into your notes that might cause legal problems later, such as “looks pregnant.” Send copies of the documentation to HR. Remember, the palest ink is better than the most retentive memory.

You must also handle each firing the same, unless emergency circumstances require extraordinary

action. Document every behavior leading to disciplinary or corrective action. Document every attempt on management’s part to coach, counsel, retrain, or otherwise help the employee improve the quality or quantity of her or his work. Send copies of



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tion, they can add value in ways that you may never have imagined, such as helping you avoid legal pitfalls. Let them help you.

## STANDARDIZE PROCEDURES

Handle each hiring the same way. For current and potential employees, have a job

that documentation to HR, and discuss with HR all options before making a final decision to terminate an employee.

### **FOCUS ON GOALS**

Your decisions about hiring or firing should focus on several interrelated goals important to the company and to you. These goals are higher productivity, stronger employee loyalty, better team morale, reaching a fair decision, correct behavior within the law, good public relations, and a decision that allows you to sleep at night.

In hiring or terminating someone, you need to focus on positive goals. Before you begin your meeting, take a few minutes to review these objectives and share them later with the job candidate or the person being fired. This helps the potential employee understand the hiring process and what you expect from your team. For an employee being let go, this review will explain the reasons for termination, and when you outline the company's severance package, many employees will accept the decision more readily.

### **PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT**

A surprising number of managers, particularly new ones, acknowledge being nervous during a hiring or firing session. Your nervous mental state affects your body in a negative way. Your mouth gets dry, your hands sweat, and your bladder shrinks. But if you can overcome these physical effects, you can also calm your mental state. What to do? Prior to the meeting, rehearse what you will say. Have water available for everyone attending; a dry mouth makes for awkward conversation. Take time to wash your hands, which helps reduce tension. Take a series of deep breaths just before the person enters the room.

**Hiring.** As soon as a job candidate arrives at your office, have the receptionist offer him or her a drink of water or a beverage and use of the rest room. They may have spent 30 to 60 minutes traveling to your office, and then time waiting somewhere if they got there early. By acknowledging their physical needs and offering to help satisfy them, you are going a long way toward building a positive emotional relationship

with this potential employee. During the interview, focus on the person's job-related qualifications, and avoid such matters as marital status, age, religion, or physical handicaps. They are lawsuit land mines.

**Firing.** Before the employee being terminated arrives, have a box of tissues ready. Under the unusual emotional stress of being fired, many people cry, just as they do at weddings and funerals. The people you are sure will not weep, will; the ones you think will, might not. If the person cries, offer a tissue and wait until he or she regains composure. If it seems appropriate, you could offer a drink of water or a brief break. Be compassionate and helpful. By doing so, you are going a long way toward providing dignity to another human being in an otherwise awkward and painful circumstance.

### **RECIPROCITY**

How you treat your candidates during the hiring process, and how you treat them during termination, is how your team will treat your customers. Treat your employees with courtesy, respect, dignity, and compas-

sion, and they will treat you and your customers likewise. It is not the people you fire who come back to haunt you. It is the ones you don't fire who come back to your facility every day to damage the work environment and your business.

So hire wisely. Then train, empower, and motivate your team members. If necessary, provide discipline and corrective action. But if nothing works, move the offending employee out the door. **W**

**B I O G R A P H Y**

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