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# Compassion while making layoffs is good for the bottom line

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You are faced with the difficult dilemma of changing the life of your employee. You may not want the duty you must perform, but it is your task and it must be done. How you proceed will make the difference in this employee's outlook about you personally, about her overall experience with your company and, perhaps, even about herself.

Although it may only seem like a bottom-line decision, you are well aware of just how emotional laying off employees can be. Nobody enjoys having to do it, but layoffs are inevitable in today's marketplace. Whether we're in an economic recession or boom, and regardless of wars, stock market fluctuations and elections, companies are bought and sold, and they grow and shrink every day.

A layoff used to carry the shame of a failed company or department, but now it's more commonly seen as a business decision, sometimes made specifically to spur a rise in stock prices.

On the other hand, during the 14 years I worked as a recruiter, no job seeker ever said to me, "Gee, my former employer was so smart. I applaud and admire his decision to terminate my colleagues and me."

And I've never met a human resources professional who actually relished carrying out reductions in her workforce. Why? Because as much as we'd like to think that a business decision — or any decision involving money — should be viewed as logical and without emotion, that's not reality.

In a society where the vast majority of us consider that what we do for a living defines who we are, you can't just unplug a person from his job and expect him to be fully functional as he looks for his next place to plug into. This is why displacing employees tends to be unpleasant. You are actually changing the way they see themselves.

Keep in mind, too, that you are also changing the way they see you and your company. When employees go out into the job market after you lay them off, they carry a message about you and your company with them. How you treat them in the process will determine the quality of that message. It will impact the reputation of your brand in a lasting way.

Also, former employees who carry a positive message about you and your brand better reflect on your personal judgment. After all, you hired and employed them for a time. Simply put, when former employees feel they were valued while with you and during the layoff, that will come through in their conversations with your competitors and other business associates in the community.

In addition to garnering more respect and fortifying your reputation, treating your employees well during displacement can impact your bottom line. When people have good attitudes and are not caught up in the struggle of releasing hurt and anger at you for letting them go, they'll be more expeditious at landing their

next job. As you know, the sooner a former employee is hired elsewhere, the better for your unemployment insurance liability.

A job search naturally comes with anxiety and fear. Compounding that already built-in challenge with the hurt and anger sometimes associated with poorly handled layoffs just adds more baggage for job seekers to shed in order to be successful.

In my experience, people with negative attitudes, such as anxiety, fear and hurt feelings, sabotage their own job search without intending to. They can have the greatest skills in the world, but if they come across as negative or bitter, no matter how much they try to hide it, a future employer will pass on them every time. On top of all that, the healing process just slows them down even more.

Compassion shown in the layoff process will go far to positively impact your brand during a time when you're dealing with enough from a public relations perspective anyway. But compassion doesn't merely help you improve community relations and the bottom line, it also makes you feel better.

As unpleasant as it is to let someone go, to end the promise of a future together, it really is the ideal opportunity for you to step up and encourage her as she moves toward the next career step. I urge you not to squander this golden chance to fortify your brand's message in the marketplace, because the ramifications of your actions, your influence on her, doesn't end when you hand over her last paycheck.

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