Tips on How to Terminate an Employee



When it is time to deliver an employment termination message, it is important to carefully word the message and to put it in writing. Here are a few general guidelines that can help to smooth a potentially difficult situation:

1. Time the decision to allow for privacy. The actual termination session should occur at a time when there will be few interruptions, possibly before or after the normal work day. Choose an office out of the view of office traffic.
2. Prepare for and rehearse your delivery. The message to the employee should be well prepared and, if possible, the delivery of the message should be rehearsed prior to the actual meeting with the employee. A script or a written outline or checklist can help assure that all important points are covered.
3. Have a witness. Invite an additional management person (a human resource colleague is a practical choice) to assist in note-taking and to act as a witness to any comments or questions that occur at the session.
4. Don’t beat around the bush. Get to the point without making excuses or minimizing the basis of the decision. Don’t engage in personal attacks or derogatory generalizations. Most importantly, make sure that the employee understands that his or her employment actually has been terminated.
5. Avoid arguments. Be open to concerns and questions, but do not enter into any argument regarding the decision. Avoid condescension or evasion, and answer questions honestly and as completely as practicable. If additional information is necessary to answer a question fully, provide such information as soon as possible.
6. Don’t agree with any arguments. Be sensitive to the employee’s anger without agreeing that the company has made any mistake or has acted inappropriately. Statements in the nature of “Yes, I think so, too,” or “I didn’t want to do this, but it’s not my decision,” can only come back to haunt the company later.
7. Outline the status of employee benefits. Briefly explain any benefits to which the individual is entitled, or provide information on how the employee can obtain this information promptly.
8. Discuss references. Explain fully what type of employment reference, if any, the company will provide. If you have a reference/employment history letter prepared, provide a copy to the employee to avoid future confusion or disagreement.
9. Be sensitive. Clearly, this is a difficult situation. In a future lawsuit,

the fairness and professionalism that is exhibited at a termination session can support the company’s position that it acted for business reasons and was at all times fair and reasonable in its decision-making process.

10. Prepare for the worst. Today, workplace violence is all too common, so be prepared for a negative response. Notify security in advance, and request advice from the company’s legal department regarding appropriate responses to extreme reactions.