

FOR MANAGERS: COPING WITH REDUCTION IN FORCE

Involuntary reductions in force are probably the most difficult experience that any supervisor or manager has to implement in their work life. One has to make very difficult choices about who will stay or go, advocate for your choices and then deliver the message to those who will be losing their job. Once the layoffs occur, you have to deal with the after effects on the remaining staff, your peers, yourself, as well as face possible continued job insecurity. There is no way to make this process easy or painless but following is some information on how supervisors and managers can cope with this trying time.

How You May React:

You may experience a wide variety of thoughts and feelings. Some of them you may not experience at all but it is helpful to know what other managers and supervisors may be experiencing.

- Guilt that you are keeping your job while others are losing theirs
- Anger that you have to facilitate layoffs
- Relief that you are not being laid off
- Conflicted feelings towards others leaders on the management team as a result of layoff decisions that were made about who should stay or go
- Uncertainty about whether you can handle the layoff notification meeting well
- Fear that an employee will become very upset
- Concern about your personal safety and that of others
- Worry about how the other employees will react to what you are doing
- Significant and unrealistic sense of responsibility to fix everything and make it okay
- Sadness about the layoffs and about particular employees who are leaving
- Worry about how laid off employees and their families will survive in the future
- Guilt or other discomfort about your role in the layoff process
- Anxiety about the future and the possibility of more layoffs
- Reexamination of your job and its meaning in your life
- Fatigue, sleep difficulty, changes in appetite
- Difficulty concentrating and/or making decisions

Handling Your Reactions:

- Acknowledge and respect your individual feelings and reactions. They are a natural result of being in a very difficult and uncomfortable situation.
- Expect that you may experience emotional ups and downs before, during, and after the layoff process.
- Be aware that each person will find their own way to navigate the process and respect those differences. It will take some longer than others to recover.
- Let important and trusted people in your life know what is happening and be open to their support.
- Avoid isolation and lack of communication with others. Peer support is extremely helpful in times like these.
- Work on letting go of any resentment you may have toward top management and your peers regarding layoff decisions with which you did not agree. This is where it is really important to keep the personal and professional separate. Those who are left have to find a way to move forward together, and sometimes “agree to disagree”.

- Think of the Serenity prayer, “Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference”.
- Be kind and patient with yourself and others. Give everyone a little more slack, including yourself.
- Do the best you can. Forget about perfection when it comes to making decisions, doing things, and what you say to others. If you come from a position of respect and integrity, and tell the truth, staff will notice that more than anything.
- Avoid being defensive or impatient with employee reactions to the layoffs. It usually helps to just listen and acknowledge the difficulty of the situation for everyone involved. You can hear what people say without having to “fix it”.
- If you are feeling exhausted, recognize that you may need extra rest.
- If you are having trouble concentrating, allow extra time to do usual tasks and temporarily reduce your expectations of what you can accomplish in a day.
- Take advantage of consultation and any other types of education and support, from, for example, the Office of Human Resources and CARE Services.
- Do not underestimate the ability of those who lose their jobs to survive and often thrive after they leave their jobs. Avoid dwelling on “worst case scenarios” for those who have left. Be open to keeping in touch with them, if that is appropriate.
- You may find yourself second guessing layoff decisions after the notifications have been made and/or those who are losing their jobs come to you with additional questions or reactions. It is important to remember you made the best decision you could, given the circumstances and budget or organizational realities.
- Carve out time for self-care like exercise, sleep, relaxation, hobbies, good meals, time with loved ones. This is especially important during such stressful times – and not a luxury.

CARE Services is available to managers and supervisors who would like a free and confidential consultation in person or by phone at 643-7754. CARE Services can also provide onsite group sessions for managers and supervisors who are involved in the reduction in force process.