

It is true that today's manpower situation is lopsided, with demand often exceeding supply. Every organisation strives to have minimum turnover of employees as well as minimise absenteeism, both of which are expensive as it affects business. Key employee replacements are not only difficult and cost more; they also come with delays in getting the right persons. Despite this, senior management personnel often have to deal with firing employees at different levels. Before getting into the art of firing, let us look at situations leading to firing.

Why firing?

Performance: This is the most common reason to fire an employee and the easiest to handle. When they join, employees show a lot of promise and if they are experienced, often they claim as if they are born performers. Performance evaluation separates performers who need to be appreciated and below average performers who have to be looked at seriously. In functional areas, such as marketing, HR or production, with set standards for performance evaluation, it's easy. In other functional areas, such as finance, expectations have to be communicated to employees in advance to establish the clarity. When performance is below average and with low potential for improvement, organisations need to resort to firing.

Attitudes and behaviour: While a positive attitude is always expected, no organisation can tolerate a negative attitude in an employee, for long. Negative attitude is rather contagious and injurious to the overall health and environment of an organisation. Spreading false rumours, being cynical and very critical of the policies, making derogatory remarks about superiors and co employees are all some of the outcomes of negative or wrong attitude and as such when they don't show corrections, despite counselling, have to be dealt with an iron hand.

Indiscipline: It's mandatory for employees to follow organisational norms of discipline. When instances of indiscipline continue perpetually, organisations have no option but to act firmly. At times, organisations have to sack even performers who are indisciplined to highlight the importance of discipline in an organisation.

Misappropriation and breach of trust: Employees in important positions sometimes are caught misappropriating funds, assets, sensitive information and documents of organisations leaving organisations no choice, but to sack. Morality has sunk in our society and corruption has spread to private sector too.

Illegal & immoral activities: Employees might indulge in activities which are prima facie illegal and has legal ramifications to the organisation. Similarly, there could be cases of immoral activities and employee abuses forcing organisations to act and uphold the principles of justice. There could be few other reasons as well. But the point is how to deal with a situation where you have to fire someone?

Just as recruiting, firing an employee is also essentially an HR task. In industries which are people oriented, functional managers need to deal with firing just as getting involved in the final selection. It's important to involve a HR



person in the task of firing. The following can be the methodology to adopt in dealing with such situations.

Probe well: There is a rule, "If you suspect a man, don't employ him, and if you employ him, don't suspect him." Assuming that you are yet to arrive at the final decision, get all information to help you. Look for quantitative and qualitative information as well.

Unbiased assessment: Once you have the information ready, assess the employee's actions unbiasedly. In case, you know the employee or have dealt with him or her, it's probably time to forget your personal issues, differences and deal with the case objectively.

Establish the cause: As the outcome of your objective and unbiased assessment, establish the cause for proposed termination. It may be a good way to establish the main cause and supplementary causes for the decision. Each such cause should have relevant information to support.

Give opportunity to defend: Just as you can't polish a gem without friction, a man cannot be perfected without trials. Do explain the charges or causes and wait for the employee to respond. It's important to give opportunity to defend and listen attentively, making notes.

Communicate the decision: Recapitulating the events, communicate the decision firmly but politely. Inform that the decision is in the interest of the organisation and if possible, try and explain that it is in the interest of the employee too.

Deal with dignity: The most important aspect of firing is to deal with the task with dignity and humanely. The decision could be affecting the employee emotionally, socially and financially. Hence the need to deal with the situation tactfully to ensure that no further damage is done to the employee. Do not hurt the employee. On the contrary, offer any assistance possible to the employee including assurance of positive reference checks.

Complete documentation: After the

discussion and communicating the decision, it's necessary to do the documentation. It's useful to keep a termination letter and or an acceptance of resignation letter handy and use the same as required. Ensure quick settlement and if possible keep an advance cheque ready.

Maintain confidentiality: Often it's useful to conceal the cause and deal with it as if it's a normal case of resignation. Agree on this with the employee to ensure single line of communication. However, where it's required, don't hesitate to inform the organisation the real reasons compelling the action. This is useful, where you intend to set an example for other employees.

Relieving employee: It's necessary that employee is relieved instantly or by the end of the day after completing the handover. If you do require the employee for any other reasons, ensure the period to be minimum.

Safeguard organisational interests: While dealing with this task, never compromise on anything that affects the organisation and it's mandatory for you to safeguard its interest. Primarily, take care to communicate to other employees in the circle of influence of the terminated employee and assuage any concerns. Reassure them that the decision doesn't affect them. Where necessary, inform the development to important clients and suppliers.

There are other aspects to this issue as well. For example, I have always found it difficult to sleep the night before sacking a senior employee. The task of firing a co-worker, a team member or a senior manager is difficult and often painful, especially where related to performance. Despite this, it's common for employees to take it personally. I have come across situations where fired employees get nasty, abusive and create a ruckus. We have to be mentally tough and take such situations as part of professional hazard.

Try your best by making a distinction between professional and personal relation. Emphasise that the decision in the organisation was collective and in the interest of the organisation. This way, there's a good chance to retain the personal relation.

Offer personal assistance to the employee to face the crisis and take some specific initiatives to build goodwill. In other words, deal with the person empathetically, as if you were in his position. In many organisations, employees perceive a complete change in attitude across the organisation, as soon as sacked and instantly develop hatred to the organisation. This shouldn't happen.

With globalisation the business environment has become extremely competitive. While, organisations today tend to be seamless, they are also constantly re-forming according to need. A policy is after all a creed liable to be changed, but while it stands, it is the responsibility of all operating managers to pursue the same with commitment and zeal. Therefore, as managers it becomes inevitable at times to fire employees but we need to deal with it tactfully and with finesse.

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