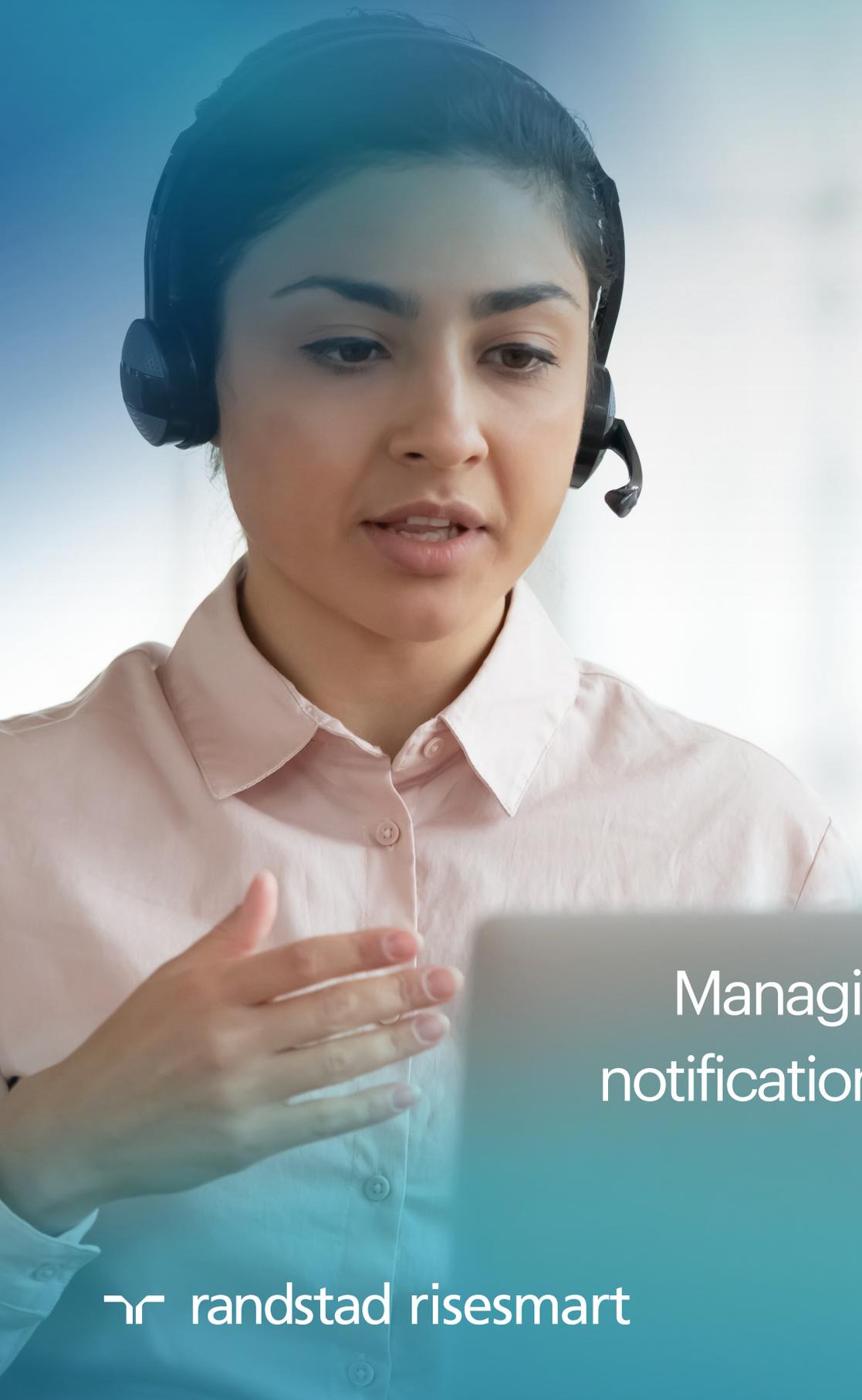


virtual notification
8 steps for success.



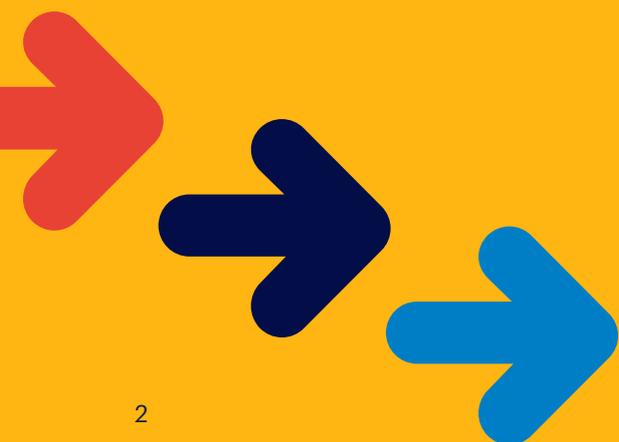
Managing a layoff
notification remotely

Notifying valued employees that they are losing their jobs is one of the most difficult situations an HR business partner or manager will face in their career. These events can be challenging and fraught with emotions for everyone involved, even in the best of times, let alone in the current situation. In an era of social distancing, the need to conduct notifications virtually is a new twist that adds complexity.

Many managers and HR professionals have admitted feeling anxious, nervous or uncertain in the days or weeks leading up to a notification. This is extremely common. While it may be impossible to eliminate these emotions altogether, you can prepare yourself and your team for this event in a way that will help everyone manage their emotions, handle the conversations well and enable employees to feel respected and heard.

The benefits of preparation cannot be underestimated: Caring for departing employees who have contributed to your organization's success, maintaining the morale and productivity of remaining employees and safeguarding your employer brand are the fruits of conscientious planning.

This guide is designed to provide you with best practices to help you plan and prepare for a virtual notification and conduct the 'day-of' notification.



types of virtual notification.

We recommend that virtual notifications be held 1:1 via video to most closely mimic an in-person, on-site notification.

If this is not possible due to the scale of the layoff and a group notification is necessary, then we recommend a video-based group communication. This allows employees receiving the news to feel they are being connected with, as well as to see your body language and match it to what they are hearing. Much communication is indirect and unspoken, conveyed through tone, facial expressions and body language.

We do not recommend notifying employees over the phone, unless no other option is available, or via email because this method is likely to be interpreted as uncaring and dismissive.





before the event

step 1: prepare yourself emotionally

Managers and even those in HR typically underestimate the toll this event will take on them. In order to be effective when planning for and conducting a notification, individuals in these roles will need to be in a good emotional space.

The first step is to acknowledge one's own emotions. These may include...



sadness



fear & anxiety



guilt



confusion, cynicism,
resentment



embarrassment

Once these feelings are acknowledged, they can be discussed with someone in HR, a manager or through resources provided by the employee assistance program (EAP). Providing notifying managers with robust, live training to help them prepare and voice concerns is another way to ensure they can work through their own emotions prior to the notification.

step 2: know your role

In planning and preparing for notifications, be sure you understand the roles of those who will conduct the actual notification. We list the key ones here, although your organization may have specific conditions that require the inclusion of additional roles. In the event of a large-scale notification, it is not uncommon for the message to be delivered by the CEO.

managers:

- Coordinate with the HR representative to schedule conversations with employees.
- Deliver the message and manage reactions.
- Communicate decisions and changes to remaining employees.

HR business partners:

- Discuss the various levels of support being provided to impacted employees.
- Answer questions from employees and structure next steps.
- Review resources and packages for impacted employees.

benefits providers:

- Help provide a vision for the departing employee's future.
- Discuss career transition support and how it will help the employee move to a more positive place as they strive to find their next opportunity.
- Provide emotional support via your EAP.

step 3: develop & practice the message

In conjunction with legal counsel, HR should craft a message that is as transparent and truthful as possible about the reasons for the job loss. The message should be clear about opportunities for redeployment within the company and everyone involved in the notification should know the process for pursuing such opportunities. Anticipate employee questions and have full information about notification periods, COBRA, benefits, and handling of accrued PTO (see step 4). Last, and most important, practice your message enough so that you can deliver it with confidence and compassion.

step 4: prepare for common employee FAQs

As with any notification event, you will want to anticipate the common questions employees may have and provide the information proactively in your message (if a group notification) or during 1:1 follow-up meetings. If you are delivering the news via 1:1 meetings with each employee, such questions will be addressed at that time.

questions may include:

- When is my last day?
- Who else is being let go?
- How much is my severance?
- What are my benefits and how long do they last?
- How do I access my severance and outplacement benefits?
- Can I get on a video call with colleagues to say goodbye or send them a farewell email?
- How can I retrieve my belongings from the office?
- How should I return company equipment and identification (e.g., badges, phone, laptop)?

step 5: anticipate common employee reactions

Job loss is one of the top stressors in life. Impacted employees immediately begin to think about their expenses such as mortgages and car payments, health care and how they will find new jobs. Often, they do not even hear the details of your message because of the emotional state they are in.

You can expect to see this range of emotions associated with the stages of grief:



shock



anger



depression



bargaining



acceptance

step 6: determine how you will respond to emotional reactions

Before the notification meeting, take time to plan your responses to various scenarios. Follow these best practices for responding to employee emotions.

- Demonstrate care and kindness.
- Allow the employee time to gain their composure, and get a tissue or a drink of water if needed.
- Express appreciation for what the employee has contributed to the team during their tenure.
- Calmly and non-defensively reiterate the decision and rationale for the separation (e.g., 'I know this is difficult news to hear. The decision is final.')
- Take time to listen compassionately and makes sure the employee understands the message.
- Avoid rushing but do not draw out the meeting.
- Avoid being apologetic, trying to relate to their emotion or siding with the employee to make them feel better.



step 7: meeting set up

for a 1:1 meeting

- The ideal meeting length is 10-15 minutes, but no longer than 20 minutes.
- Make sure to give yourself a few minutes of breathing space between meetings; do not schedule back to back without a break.
- Send the meeting invite close to the time of the actual meeting but with adequate time for the recipient to see the calendar invitation.
- Specify the time, date and number or conference link in the calendar invitation.
- Use the meeting title, '1:1 Meeting' with no further details.
- Maintain absolute confidentiality about the event.
- Ensure the severance package – whether sent digitally or via a delivery service – does not arrive before message is delivered.
- If many employees are being let go, try to schedule as many meetings concurrently as possible (to avoid the spread of rumors among employees); consider enlisting meeting support from other managers.

for group notification

- Specify the time, date and number or conference link in the calendar invitation.
- Use the meeting title, 'Company Announcement' with no further details.
- Maintain absolute confidentiality regarding all aspects of the event.
- Ensure the severance package – whether sent digitally or via a delivery service – does not arrive before the message is delivered.
- Use a webinar platform that ensures anonymity and confidentiality and allows people the privacy required to have their own reaction to the news.



step 8: day of notification

You will conduct the virtual notification meeting just as you would in person, making some additional special arrangements depending upon whether the notification is 1:1 or to a group.

for 1:1 meetings

Before and in-between meetings:

- Treat the meeting formally, in tone and appropriate dress, and avoid chit-chat.
- Set yourself up in a private space that is quiet and will allow you to be uninterrupted.
- Natural daylight lighting is best.
- Position yourself to show that you are paying attention.
- Position the camera at eye level and make eye contact with the camera, not the screen.
- Encourage the employee to take the meeting in a quiet, distraction-free setting.
- Check in with yourself after each meeting to ensure you maintain a tone of compassion and respect.

for group notifications

When no other option exists and your company must notify impacted employees at the same time, take these additional precautions for video-based notifications:

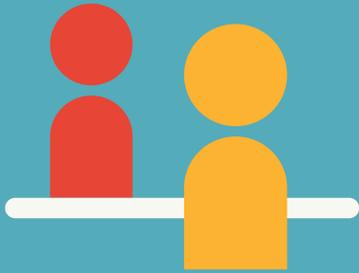
- Deliver the notification live, not recorded.
- Keep attendees off-camera to allow them to have personal reactions without being seen by the rest of the group.
- Consider disabling the public chat and questions features to prevent employees from venting or making regrettable remarks in the heat of the moment.
- If offering outplacement, have the outplacement firm join to explain the career transition services that employees will receive and to share ideas for immediate actions they can take.
- Schedule 1:1 follow-up meetings expediently to cover employee-specific issues and answer questions.
- If the scale of the reduction in force doesn't allow for 1:1 follow-up meetings, schedule plenty of information sessions where employees have an opportunity to ask questions and get support, and ensure that employees' managers are fully trained and able to answer 1:1 questions as much as possible.

If employees miss the group notification due to illness, PTO or some other reason, be sure to reach out as soon as possible to arrange 1:1 meetings. You may need to contact them on their personal phones. Be aware that employees will likely have heard the news from either colleagues or the media.

key meeting elements

- Set the tone for the meeting and be mindful of emotions.
- Deliver the notification as rehearsed.
- Show compassion and respect.
- State reasons for the business decision.
- Confirm understanding of the message.
- For 1:1 meetings:
 - Listen and respond to the employee compassionately and appropriately, and ask if they have questions.
 - Avoid sharing confidential information, speculating or giving personal opinion.
- Share information about next steps, including redeployment opportunities.
- Provide information about outplacement/career transition services:
 - Registration can be completed via text, email or phone.
 - Transition programs are excellent and will give them the support they need to be successful in their career transition.
 - Encourage employee to take advantage of services as soon as possible for maximum benefit.
- Arrange for employee to retrieve personal property from their workstation and arrange for the return of company property, either via drop-off or postage paid mailing.

5 keys to success for your virtual meeting.



set the tone & control the meeting



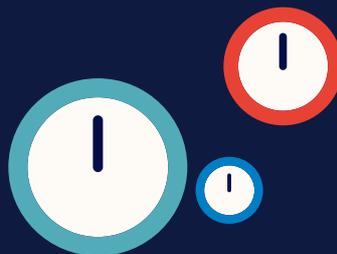
deliver the separation message as rehearsed



listen & respond compassionately & appropriately



share information, resources & next steps



close the meeting

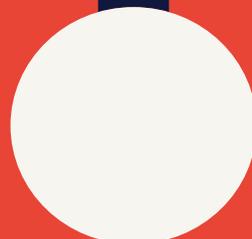
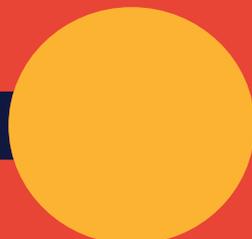
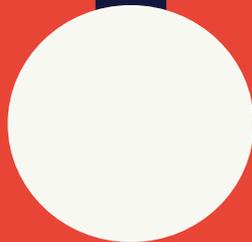
rules of the road.

do

- Rehearse the message and provide consistent information.
- Be sensitive and respectful of your employees as this is tough news to hear.
- Convey the decision is final.
- Listen and allow time to react.
- Be clear and concise, while also being sensitive to employees' emotional state.
- Remain calm and professional.
- Strive to keep the meeting within the designated time.
- Allow time between meetings when you have more than one individual to notify.
- Provide consistent information.
- Use phrases such as 'I know this is difficult news to hear...,' and 'I hear you...'
- Communicate proactively and transparently with remaining employees.

don't

- Rush.
- Make small talk.
- Use humor.
- Apologize.
- Create false hope or make promises.
- Make statements about employees' performance.
- Criticize the company, its managers or the decision.
- Focus too much on the business reasons; otherwise the employee may not realize they are being let go.
- Use phrases such as 'I'm sorry...,' 'Everything happens for a reason...,' 'I know how you feel...,' 'Don't be angry...,' or 'Let me give you some advice...'

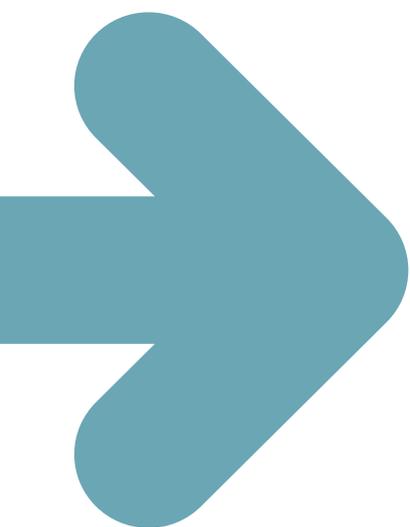
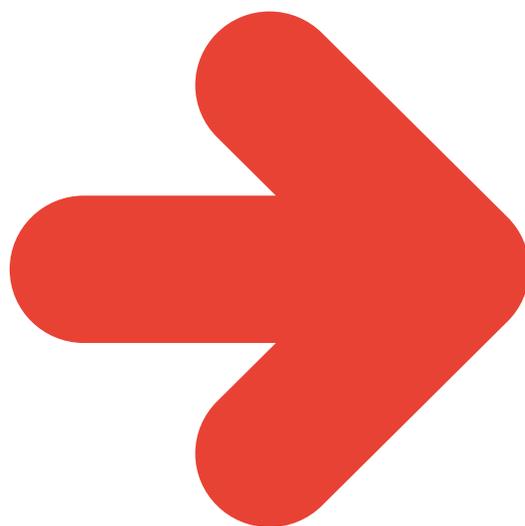
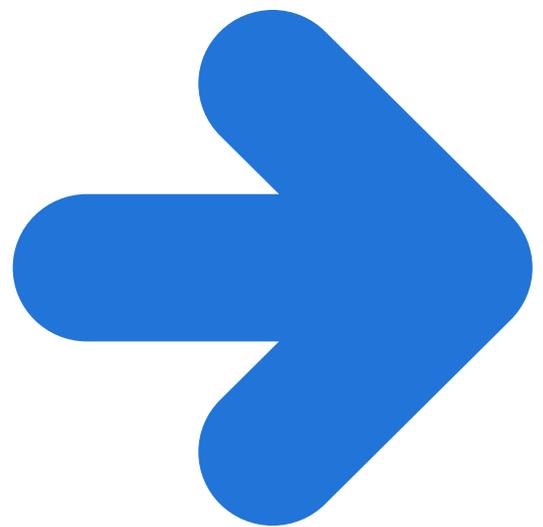


summary.

When you take adequate time to plan and prepare your message and deliver it with authenticity, transparency and compassion, you will convey the value that you place on both your departing and remaining employees. Even in challenging times when a layoff must be communicated remotely, you will be able to uphold your company's reputation.

In the days, weeks and months that follow, communication with remaining employees will be critical as they experience their own emotional reactions and readjust to new business priorities, expectations, workloads and teams. Continue to be supportive of your employees, acknowledging their concerns, showing appreciation for their contributions and encouraging thoughtful innovation to help the business continue moving forward.

You will find that by investing in your departing and remaining employees, you will set up your organization to be recognized as an employer of choice. When the economy brightens and you begin to hire again, you will be positioned to attract top talent.





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