

Sever employee ties the right way

Occasions will arise when you have to let an employee go. How you handle it determines how smooth the process will be. Here are some strategies that experienced managers use:

- **Make thorough preparations before firing an employee.** By documenting a new hire's performance from the beginning of his or her tenure, you have wisely provided a foundation for the worst-case scenario (firing) should it materialize. Don't look for negatives, but don't bury them or try to ignore them, either.
- **Remember: If the employee is surprised, you haven't done your job.** No employee should ever be "shocked" when they're let go. As a manager, it's your job to offer feedback and criticism to wayward employees. By the time you're forced to fire someone, so many other options should have been explored that the person is almost "ready" to be let go.
- **Offer a "Career Decision Day" as a last resort if repeated warnings don't work.** On Friday, tell the employee to take Monday off, with pay, as a Career Decision Day. Ask him or her to be prepared on Tuesday morning to make one of two choices: 1) To improve in all areas where he or she is lacking; or 2) To accept termination with appropriate severance pay. If the employee opts for improvement, set very specific goals with deadlines.
- **Don't mix the good with the bad.** Many managers make the mistake of being too nice when letting someone go. They feel guilty, so they try to sugarcoat it: "Well, John, you really did some good things here, but unfortunately your chronic inability to stay organized overshadows all the positives." That sends a mixed message and may confuse the employee. When firing someone, leave the good out.
- **Don't talk about the situation.** Firing someone is a traumatic experience, and the temptation is to want to talk about it with others. Don't. Don't look for support; don't try to rationalize it to other managers or your other employees. Talking about it is not only unprofessional, but it could pave the way for a libel lawsuit against your company.
- **Be ready to be angry.** Often, managers wait too long before firing someone, letting anger and frustration build up. These emotions are likely to surface if the employee starts to question your decision. Be ready for this, and remain professional. Present your facts and documentation, and don't argue with the employee.