

HR Insights

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Conducting a Remote Layoff

Conducting a layoff is never easy—and conducting a layoff virtually adds new challenges for employers. While difficult for both the employer and employees effected, employers can improve this process by utilizing best practices. Effective remote layoffs can ease this difficult time for laid-off employees, while avoiding risk for the employer.

What Are Layoffs?

Layoffs are mass firings of employees, sparked by a need to cut expenses to save an organization in crisis—not typically due to employee performance. However, layoffs are permanent. Unlike furloughed employees, laid-off employees no longer have access to their employee benefits. However, they are typically entitled to unemployment assistance.

Expansion of Remote Work—and Remote Layoffs

A survey conducted by the Society of Human Resource Management and Oxford Economics found that 64% of HR professionals report having salaried professionals who are working remotely. Though remote work had been growing prior to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, more employees are working remotely than ever before.

This same survey found that 32% of employers are planning on reducing their headcounts—through actions such as layoffs. Given current economic conditions, cost-saving measures such as layoffs are a reality for many employers. Unfortunately, in-person layoffs aren't always feasible, and employers should prepare accordingly.

Conducting a Remote Layoff

When creating a process for remote layoffs, employers can consider including the following practices:

- **Set up a meeting**—Ensure varying time zones are accounted for, as participants may be joining from various locations.
- **Include HR, and the employee's manager**—Including both HR and the employee's manager can eliminate the need for multiple conversations.
- **Use video platforms if possible**—Though the layoff won't take place in person, using a video platform can allow for a face-to-face conversation. If video is not an option, consider a phone conference rather than an email.
- **Be detailed**—Include critical information such as the termination date, and benefits and compensation information.
- **Create expectations**—Be transparent about next steps for the affected employee—including the return of company-owned critical assets.
- **Prepare to answer questions**—Support the laid-off employee by being prepared to answer clarifying questions that he or she may have.

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Prepare for Follow-up Steps

When conducting layoffs—there are necessary steps to be completed. To ensure that loose ends are tied up, employers may consider the following:

- **Proactively involving IT**—Before conducting remote layoffs, communicate with IT about removing the laid-off employee's access to internal networks. As you won't be able to collect equipment immediately, it will be necessary to conduct IT tasks remotely. Let IT know of any required actions in advance to ensure that tasks can be completed in a timely manner while avoiding missteps.
- **Creating specific follow-up actions**—There may be follow-up actions that need to take place—don't hesitate. Follow-up actions may need to be completed not only by the employer but by the employee being laid-off. Employers will want to plan for follow-up actions, including:
 - Mailing or shipping necessary materials
 - Providing necessary resources

Employers should also ensure to provide the laid-off employee with guidance and resources to complete any required tasks. These may include:

- Returning any proprietary documents or information
- Requiring signatures—completed via next-day delivery, or electronically

Effective Remote Layoffs

Laying off employees can be a necessary reality for many employers. More work functions, including the process of laying off an employee, are often beginning to take place remotely. By using best practices, employers can minimize risk for the organization and ease the transition for affected employees. Laws and guidelines related to terminations may vary—when updating practices, employers should consult with local legal counsel. For additional remote workplace resources, contact Hausmann-Johnson Insurance & The Benefit Services Group, Inc..