

# 10 Tips for Communicating a Reduction in Force (RIF)

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A thoughtful, well-planned communication strategy is a key component of managing a reduction in force. “By preparing well, anticipating concerns and communicating honestly about why your company is taking this action and what it believes it will accomplish by doing so, you can use this occasion to create a shared sense of purpose and commitment” say Beth Haiken, author of PR News’ “Employee Communication Guidebook.” Consider these communication suggestions:

1. Communicate honestly, openly and frequently.
2. Talk about the fact that company changes are coming. Provide a timeline of when changes may occur, it will increase trust and productivity. Be sure managers and supervisors are well informed and can answer questions. Communicating factual information to employees will help decrease anxiety and speculation.
3. Explain the strategic and financial reasons leading to a change in how the company is doing business. Emphasize the need for greater efficiency and profitability.
4. Use a variety of strategies to communicate about expected changes. E-mail, newsletters, open forums, departmental meetings, bulletin voice mails are all effective tools. Executives, managers and supervisors need to be visible and approachable—unless you are in a private meeting, doors should be open.
5. Discuss all the options that have been considered or implemented by executive management in an attempt to relieve the financial situation. Those options could be hiring freezes, wage freezes, reduction of benefits, job sharing, and terminating employees with performance issues. A reduction in force should be viewed as the last resort.
6. Discuss how and why the decision to downsize was made. Be sure and describe a well thought out process. Remaining employees recover sooner if they believe the process was fair.
7. Explain the current financial conditions and the impact of staff reduction in labor dollars.
8. Explain how executive management made decisions on which employees were chosen. Employees are usually chosen by seniority, obsolete job classifications, duplication of jobs when functions merge, or class of employee (part-time, contract, temporary).
9. Explain how the company will “care” for the downsized employees. Emphasize they will be treated fairly and with respect. Examples: recall rights, severance, job placement assistance and EAP services.
10. If you don’t know the answer, don’t guess it. Although you’ve tried to anticipate questions, you may get a question that you don’t know the answer to. Don’t guess. If you are not sure, then be sure to communicate that you will find out, and provide a deadline for your answer.