



Throughout my career I've had to let a lot of people go.

And once I was let go myself.

I'm not sure which one is worse, but I do know that they're both pretty terrible.

Unfortunately the way we handle this situation often makes it even more terrible than it already is.

The focus today is to talk about how to let somebody go in the least terrible way you possibly can.

It matters because it's fairly common and at some point in your career, you are very likely to either need to let somebody go, a colleague is going to be let go, maybe you might be let go.

There are really significant consequences to this. There are a lot of legal consequences. We're not going to get into all that today, but of course it's important to recognize there are a lot of legal consequences to this.

There are also very important human consequences to this. In addition to somebody losing their job, often abruptly, there are financial considerations and all of the bills and obligations that people have. They can have devastating consequences for people.

In addition to that, as they try to move forward and get other positions, in many cases, they have to forever disclose that they've been let go.

Then there is that human element of their confidence and how much it can shake their core to have this experience happen to them. We can't take this lightly and we have to do everything we can to make this terrible situation a little less terrible. It might sound silly to ask why this is challenging for you but it's not a rhetorical question.

What is challenging about this for you?

Have you had to let someone go in the past?

What was that experience like?

Are you about to have to let someone go?

How are you preparing for that or how are you avoiding that?

Have you ever been let go?

What was that experience like for you?

How do you wish it had gone down?



And how can you shift your mindset to better serve you?

So there are a lot of things you're going to have to consider before getting to the point of letting somebody go.

These are some big ones.

Have you given them every chance to stay?

Now sometimes the reason people are let go is for one really big egregious thing that some of this stuff doesn't apply to. But let's take the scenario where it's sort of a slow burn. It's somebody's performance, and it's getting worse and worse over time. Maybe they've done the performance plan thing. They've done the warning system- however your job does it.

Really ask yourself- have you given them a legitimate chance to make it right? For a lot of us, once we go down that path, we're so ready for that person to be gone that we're just getting our ducks in a row in order to let them go.

I get it, but to be strong leaders we have to focus on the fact that the main goal for everybody involved is for them to stay.

So, have you legitimately given them every opportunity to make it right and stay?

It's bad for everybody involved. It's bad for you for having to do it. It's horrible for the person being let go. The staff all know who gets let go even if you don't publicly state it. It's just a bad situation all around.

But just because it's a bad situation doesn't mean you should avoid it. There are some instances when people need to go.

For a lot of leaders, what they say when they eventually go through the process and they let somebody go, is, they wish they had done it sooner.

In most cases, yes, you have to give it a lot of thought but don't give it so much thought that you're just dragging it, dragging it, dragging it when you should have let this person go a lot earlier.

Do not blindside them. This is already going to be a huge shock even if they have been warned, so do whatever you can with HR and however policies work and how the legalities work, but do whatever you can to be really upfront before you actually make that final decision.

This is not about you and your discomfort. Focus on the other person. Make it about them. Focus on what they need.



The asterisk is- it is about you in terms of how you go about this and how you do this in the most human and empathetic way that you possibly can.

Get coaching and support for yourself before you go through this process and maybe afterwards too. It's tricky. It's hard. Nobody wants to ever have to do this. Get support and you can practice and role play and do all that stuff to prepare you for this ultimate conversation.

Protect yourself legally.

Be crystal clear with the person throughout this process not just in the conversation when you're letting them go but leading up to it.

I had a staff once that was on a performance plan and they were really close to being let go and in the end they resigned before that happened, but I kept doing all this documentation and meetings and everything else and nothing was changing. I remember talking to my boss and saying, 'you know, aren't they worried about getting fired?'

And my boss said, 'well, do they know that it's possible that they might get fired?'

And I said, 'well, I I don't see why not or how not. I put it in every single documentation and email and follow up.'

And my boss said, 'have you used those words? Terminated. Fired. Let go. Whatever term you use. Is it in there or do you think it was just implied?'

To me it was very clear because I knew what I was trying to do through all this documentation, but I looked back through it and I realized I was doing everything in my power to avoid using those words.

In the very next documentation, I put those words in and then that's when the staff really reacted. It was true. They didn't really hear it because I wasn't being clear and you need to be really clear if this is something that's a possibility that they're aware of it and you're using the words to make it clear.

Of course involve whatever version of HR you have to make sure you're doing stuff legally and ethically and be as supportive and authentic as you possibly can.

If it does come down to you having to let somebody go, you have to be prepared for what you can say to the rest of your staff.

You obviously want to protect the person who's being let go- their confidentiality and their privacy.

You want to have an open, honest conversation with your staff about what this means. It's a very delicate line.



Involve your HR and make sure you're saying things you're allowed to say.

What happens a lot of times when somebody gets let go is then other people start worrying about their positions because you can't disclose why somebody's let go so they don't know if it's for cause or maybe you're downsizing or who knows what's running through their minds. Work with your support including your HR about what you can and cannot say to your team.

You can't say nothing because there was a huge event that happened and you can't just pretend it didn't happen.

Find out what you can say so that you can say something to your team.

I hope, I hope, I hope you don't have to prepare to let someone go, but if that is the case, how will you prepare yourself if you decide to let someone go?