



Balance Courage and Love in Firing

By Scott T. Fleischmann

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“When you lose the feeling of sorrow in a firing, get out of management, because you do not love people enough to manage them. When you delay dismissing people who need to be fired, get out of management, because you do not have the courage to be a manager.”

This was the advice that I received from my boss, John, when I had to implement my first firing. I had been sitting in my office as he passed my door, and he returned and asked me why I seemed so glum. I told him that I had to release Ed the following day, and I was grieving the act that would leave him without the means to support his family of seven. Ed was not performing his job competently. I had to fire him. That explanation prompted John’s sage advice.

How does a manager maintain the balance between courage and love when firing an employee? We need to do the appropriate preparation, administer the firing as Jesus would do it and provide as much support as possible for the fired employee.

Preparation

An effective manager continually discusses performance issues with each employee. An employee who is not performing well should therefore know in advance of the firing that his or her job is in jeopardy. During the performance improvement process, the conversations should be documented, including changes in employment status. When the manager sets up the dismissal meeting, the employee should be aware that it might be the last meeting with this organization.

Self-preparation is more complex. Managers need to deal with their own emotions as well as those of the employee. A clear understanding of the reason for the dismissal is imperative to keeping the meeting focused on the issues rather than the emotions. Review the documents from prior performance evaluation meetings. Then create a script for the meeting.

Employment law is another concern that requires planning. Governing bodies regulate hiring and firing to construct fair employment for all citizens. The wise manager is aware of those laws and follows them judiciously. We are obligated to give respect to the governing authorities (Romans 13), and we do that by obeying the laws.

Prepare a list of benefits for the employee to take away from the meeting. They should have information about what will happen after the dismissal. Will the company provide healthcare? Will he or she receive severance pay? What will the employer say when other companies call to ask about performance issues?

The Meeting

The meeting needs to be short and concise in order to avoid conflict. Use a schedule to keep it on track. Open with a statement of purpose: “Mary, for the past six months we have worked together to change your performance to meet the standards that we set together. We have not been able to accomplish the goals of that plan, so your employment is coming to an end.”

Although the employee may ask for reasons, this is not a good time to discuss them. They should be aware of the reasons from prior discussions. Discussing it again at the dismissal will only delay the meeting.

Then give the details of the dismissal: describe future benefits, explain the security process for leaving the building and describe how to return company-owned property. Finally, wish the employee well with future employment and end the meeting.

There should be three people in the meeting: the manager, the employee and one reliable witness. All three should take notes so that there is adequate documentation in case of a future dispute.

Post-Firing Support

A fired employee may be angry or discouraged by the firing. Company provided support might alleviate some of those feelings. They need to look to the future. Companies that provide a resume

service or outplacement for the former employee assist them in focusing on the future rather than the past.

In firing, as in everything, Jesus is our guide. We need to pray about the decision, pray for the employee and pray that God gives us the courage and the compassion to love the fired employee.

When Jesus met the woman at the well, He was firm yet loving. At the Last Supper, as He shared the betrayal that He would suffer, His compassion and strength were again seen. His patience with Peter—in foot washing, during the denial before dawn and removing the soldier’s ear—are examples of His love and strength.

If we prepare for the firing; conduct a loving, organized dismissal; and show care for the employee’s future; we can be confident that we are witnessing with courage and compassion.

Integrity Business Solutions Inc. [www.aboutintegrity.net], began in 1998 to help leaders integrate the best time-tested business solutions into the complex markets of the 21st century. A management consulting firm, it offers several syndicated columns each week to newspapers in the United States, including “The Faithful Leader,” “Management Topics,” and “Career Notes.”

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