

Communicating During Layoffs

Layoffs of any number present serious challenges to employees and employers alike. But for companies involved in mass layoffs, one particular challenge relates to how to communicate this news – to community leaders, the news media and, of course, to affected employees as well as to employees who'll remain behind.

One of our long-time clients, a utility, was undergoing a major restructuring that included job eliminations. Our assignment involved helping several dozen HR and other managers fine tune their communication skills for employee meetings. Those meetings would be especially challenging because it might be weeks or months before the restructuring process would be complete and some employees would know their employment status.

A primary goal of our work with this client was to ensure that all the managers who would be conducting the employee meetings communicated with strength and compassion. To that end, we recorded and critiqued their prepared remarks – offering them an outsider's perspective on their “delivery” skills, including what they said, how they said it, and how they fielded questions. Moreover, we were not hesitant to let our primary contacts for this assignment know which individuals were not quite “ready for prime time.”