

Communication and Compassion Crucial During Downsizing

*By Donna Rawady, Executive Coach
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No article or single resource will be a cure-all for the challenges you'll face as a leader during a period of layoffs because you will need a complex set of skills, business strategies, decisions and communication. But it may help to consider the following as you prepare for, and manage after, a downsizing event:

- If you're able to arrange a meeting with your own team immediately before a larger announcement, do so. If you're unable to connect as a team before the announcement, make every effort to do so immediately after. Allow your team to ask questions and discuss their concerns. Anticipate and be prepared to answer difficult questions calmly and confidently. If possible, announce or publish the names of those who have been discharged to minimize repeated and extended shock and loss

- Be sensitive to the emotional impact of downsizing on those left behind. Understand the remaining employees' anticipation of increased responsibilities and their feelings of insecurity. In addition, it may be helpful to reflect on what a corporate-downsizing survivor shared with me about his experience. He compared the shock of the news and the absence of colleagues to experiencing their deaths. He experienced guilt for being able to stay on as a newer employee, as tenured employees were discharged. A leader's compassion and understanding of these common emotions is essential to leading others through a downsizing event and transition.

- Continue to set clear expectations and engage employees in setting realistic goals for themselves to help employees buy in to a new structure. Activating accountability by communicating and agreeing on measurable outcomes and target dates will begin to build trust and stability.

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