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GUIDE TO  
***Professional  
Parting***

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## A Commitment to Diversity

The Postal Service is committed to fostering and achieving a work and learning environment that respects and values a diverse workforce. Valuing and managing diversity in the Postal Service means that we will build an inclusive environment that respects the uniqueness of every individual and encourages the contributions, experiences, and perspectives of all people.

It is essential that our work and learning environments be free from discrimination and harassment on any basis.

In our classrooms, on the workroom floor, in casual conversation and in formal meetings, employees and faculty are asked to encourage an open learning environment that is supportive to everyone.

Course materials and lectures, classroom debates, and casual conversation should always reflect the commitment to safety and freedom from discrimination, sexual harassment, and harassment on any prohibited basis.

Executive and Administrative Schedule (EAS) training staff have a professional obligation to provide a safe, discrimination and sexual harassment free learning environment. Instructors are expected to support this commitment. Class participants are asked to support the goal of zero tolerance of behavior that violates these commitments.

If you find course material that is presented in the classroom or in self-instructional format that does not follow these guidelines, please let an instructor know immediately. If classroom discussions do not support these principles, please point that out to the instructor, as well.

***Guide to Professional Parting***

The material contained in this publication is intended to serve as a guide to assist managers, postmasters, and supervisors in working with employees. It does not amend, modify, or supercede any Postal Service regulations, handbooks, or manuals. No employee rights or causes of action are created by this publication.

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## INTRODUCTION

This guide is designed to assist supervisors, managers, and postmasters, referred to in this pamphlet as managers, in administering the removal process in a professional manner. Many consider removals to be the most difficult and unpleasant aspect of their work. Such reactions are both normal and understandable. Removals can have a significant and lasting effect on the departing employee as well as family members, co-workers, and managers.

Even more important is for managers to understand their responsibility to try to help a potential problem employee immediately upon determining he or she is experiencing problems that could lead to discipline. The Postal Service is committed to the just treatment of its employees.

Managers are to communicate and give feedback about performance throughout an employee's career. For some, unfortunately, the removal process may be necessary. However, actions taken to help an employee may, in many cases, prevent the need for disciplinary action.

If involuntary separation is necessary, it is imperative that the removal process is handled professionally. All available resources should be used by the manager to effect the transition of the employee while maintaining dignity and respect. This includes professional assistance in assessing physical and psychological consequences that could result from a separation.

It is recognized that with removals there can be a potential for violence. Managers must defuse this potential by recognizing warning signs, knowing how to get help during the removal process, and conducting a safe and effective meeting with the employee being terminated.

We hope this guide will assist managers in handling separations professionally with the right support.

# MANAGER AWARENESS

## *Behavioral Tendencies*

In most cases, there is minimal worry about an employee demonstrating a violent reaction to adverse administrative action, including removal. Most employees will likely be upset and feel the action is unwarranted, but will not resort to violence. However, it is important to keep in mind that it is possible for any individual to engage in inappropriate workplace behavior when they are very emotional or under a great deal of stress. There is no sure way to predict human behavior, and while there may be warning signs, there is no specific profile of a potentially dangerous individual.

If it is determined that an employee's behavior is sufficiently unusual or a cause of concern, and the adverse action taken was not a removal, consideration must be given to sending the employee for a psychiatric fitness-for-duty exam. Before this is done, medical staff more familiar with behavioral symptoms must be consulted.

Management Instruction EL-860-2000-7, *Fitness-for-Duty Examinations*, is available on the Postal Service Intranet or can be ordered from the Material Distribution Center. Please review this reference before considering a fitness-for-duty exam.

Important factors to consider in identifying potential problem employees are:

- Being alert to any changes in the state of mind of your employees; notice behavior that seems excessive or out of character. Stressful life events such as a death in family, illness, or divorce can cause a change in an employee's state of mind.
- One of the best predictors of future behavior is past behavior; be observant of employees who in discussions indicate approval of violent acts or have a past history of violent behavior.
- Persons who commit acts of violence often have had life experiences that may have taught them to erroneously believe that violence is a legitimate and acceptable means of resolving problems.
- Sudden changes in work performance; good and reliable performers suddenly become poor and unreliable performers. This signals something may have occurred in their lives to cause a change in attitude toward their work.

## Identifying Risk Factors

Making predictions about behavior is a difficult task. Below are a few “risk factors” that may lead to changes in behavior.

RISK FACTORS	
Anger & Hatred	Threatening Behavior
Emotional Reactions	Nonacceptance of Criticism
Paranoid Tendencies	Fascination with Weapons
Withdrawal-Isolation	Victim Mentality
Drug or Alcohol Abuse	Reduction in Work Performance
Obsessive Interest in Others	Depression
Disregard for Others	Accepts No Responsibility for Behavior
Stress	

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## Adverse Action Prevention Methods

What can you do as a manager to assist an employee now to prevent the possibility of taking disciplinary action, including removal, in the future?

- Maintain open lines of communication with all employees. Take the time to communicate with at-risk employees as soon as it is realized there is a potential problem.
- Make your first assumption about an employee a positive one, i.e., “the employee really needs to be off work” versus “the employee is just trying to get out of work” or “the employee is in a lot of pain” versus “he or she is just faking it.”
- Communicate face to face and listen to the employee’s point of view.
- Recognize that differences in the culture of an employee may play a role in behavior. Try to determine how to understand, adapt to, or accommodate those differences.

- If appropriate, offer your assistance in resolving any problem disclosed by the employee. Be sure to follow through; do not make promises you cannot keep.
- Make an early referral of an employee in need of assistance to the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Keep in mind that EAP is not only a useful resource for employees experiencing a drug or alcohol problem, but EAP makes referrals for those in need of financial, social, or marital assistance, as well as other factors that affect an employee's work or home life. **Your referral cannot be mandatory; it is the employee's choice whether or not to go to EAP.**
- Be aware of situations involving employees with a disability. Unusual behavior may be caused by complications related to the disability. Seek assistance from your local diversity development specialist, medical staff, or manager of human resources for advice on how to respond to these situations.
- Conduct a follow-up discussion to determine if the problem for the employee is now resolved.
- Do not become offended or change your attitude toward an employee who may not accept your offer of assistance. Continue to treat him or her with respect.

These are five effective ways to minimize potential problems associated with interacting with employees:

## 5 WAYS TO MINIMIZE PROBLEMS

1. Being educated on behavioral indicators that might signal a problem.
2. Knowing your employees.
3. Knowing and using available resources.
4. Treating employees with respect.
5. Communicating with potential problem employees to better understand their problems.

## ***Do's and Don'ts in Confronting Situations***

Managers face situations in which employees show signs of troubled behavior. Ignoring evident problems in employee behavior only delays necessary action and often leads to a worsening of the problem situation.

It is quite natural to want to avoid talking to employees about their behavior and to make excuses or just ignore the unacceptable behavior and hope the problem goes away.

Problems seldom go away unless addressed. Unacceptable behavior and job performance must be addressed immediately. Thus, it is suggested that you take notice of the following "Do's and Don'ts" in confronting employees:

### **DO**

- Address unacceptable employee behavior and performance problems directly, but professionally and respectfully.
- Take notice of complaints about an employee seriously and follow through to determine validity.
- In a confidential personal file, maintain written notes of an employee's behavior or performance, including good performance, performance problems, and unusual behavior.
- Behave appropriately at all times, no matter how inappropriately an employee may be behaving.
- Keep upper management informed of potential employee problems.
- Consult with human resources personnel on how to resolve potential problems and improve working conditions.
- Document unusual, unacceptable, or potentially dangerous behavior and/or performance problems.
- Communicate with the employee to find out what is causing the unusual behavior and/or poor performance.
- Contact your local training manager if you determine training is required.
- Contact EAP if counseling might be beneficial for the employee. Keep in mind that participation in the EAP program is voluntary.
- Take disciplinary action if poor or inappropriate behavior continues.

## **DON'T**

- Cover up mistakes.
- Avoid confronting a situation.
- Fail to enforce regulations or take appropriate action because the employee is your friend.
- Make excuses for unacceptable or inappropriate performance or behavior.
- Ignore abusive language and conduct.
- Discipline an employee because of race, sex, or cultural background.

## **Personal Concerns, Worries, and Barriers**

Clearly, discipline of any kind, and especially the removal process, can affect virtually every aspect of a person's life. For the manager, being involved in and observing the stress and emotion can be difficult and painful. The first step in developing and refining skills is recognition of the concerns and feelings that can become a barrier to an effective removal. Some of the personal concerns, worries, and barriers of managers involved in a removal process are as follows:

- Having little experience and/or training may cause a lack of confidence in managing removals.
- Avoiding such situations because of uncertainty about how to respond to an employee's possible negative reactions.
- Being the cause of another person's suffering or disappointment.
- Handling the possible consequences of another person being upset or angry.
- Losing control or being at a loss for words at the removal session.
- Being confused about whether or not there is more to gain or lose by delivering the message.
- Having insufficient justification for the action.
- Being verbally or physically threatened or harmed during or after a removal meeting.
- Having the support of your manager that the decision will not be overturned.

Careful planning, preparation, and documentation can address each of the above concerns, worries, or barriers, and will help a manager accomplish the process professionally and effectively. A manager should deliver the message immediately. Policies and procedures not enforced promptly lose power to positively influence employee behavior.

Additional resources can help beyond the above issues. Resources, such as your workplace improvement analyst, human resources, medical staff, labor relations, and postal legal counsel should be used for the above concerns and help in overcoming any anxieties or areas where a manager feels he or she lacks confidence.

A manager should not experience thoughts that the action being taken is unjustified as long as he or she is confident of having done everything possible to assist an employee.

# HANDLING REMOVALS

## Removal Process

In the event it becomes necessary to remove an employee, there are two principal objectives that need to be met.

1. The first objective is to effect removals in a way that protects the integrity of the process and recognizes the intrinsic human value of the employee.
2. The second objective is to assist the departing employee in making a smooth transition from the Postal Service.

Removal sessions that are well planned and conscientiously conducted facilitate both objectives. The meeting provides an opportunity for managers and resource people to work together to reinforce a message of concern for the employee's welfare. It also allows assessment of potential risks for violent behavior.

The most successful removal sessions result when a manager is well prepared, practices, and includes participation of additional resources.

**Preparation** includes not only planning the time, place, and content of the meeting, and also contacting appropriate resources such as workplace improvement analyst, EAP, human resources personnel, medical staff, postal legal counsel, and a labor relations representative. This allows the manager to conduct the meeting in a professional and secure manner.

**Practice** includes review of what is planned to be said, anticipation of possible employee reactions, and development of appropriate responses.

**Participation** includes contacting appropriate resources to assist departing employees during and after the meeting.

## Types of Sessions

### MANAGER PLANNING SESSION

The planning meeting is intended for the manager to consult with available resources when there is concern about an employee understanding the charges or appeal rights. It is also convened if there is any possibility of the employee violently acting out or displaying any other seriously inappropriate behavior. This meeting occurs prior to issuing the letter of removal. In some cases a meeting is not needed; rather, telephonic or e-mail consultation can occur. The resources needed will depend on the employee's position and the circumstances involved.

The general guidelines are:

- If the employee appears to be experiencing emotional problems or other personal difficulties affecting work performance, conduct, or attendance, seek assistance through the EAP.
- If the problem situation involves a supervisor, manager or postmaster, a management representative (National Association of Postal Supervisors, National Association of Postmasters of the United States, National League of Postmasters) may be contacted.
- If the problem situation involves a craft employee, a shop steward may be contacted.
- If serious health problems or injuries appear to be affecting an employee's job performance, the situation would require the assistance of medical resources.
- If there have been threats of violence and/or risk of violence indicators present, contact the local Threat Assessment Team, the Inspection Service, or both.
- If the employee has a disability (e.g., deaf or hard of hearing), arrangements must be made for appropriate accommodations at the removal meeting.

After consultation, the following checklist will help a manager in planning for the removal meeting:

- Review the employee's Official Personnel Folder.
- Set clear goals you want to accomplish.
- Collect and organize all paperwork needed.
- Arrange to conduct the meeting in a secure and confidential setting.
- Establish a time and way to notify the employee and do it well in advance.
- Based on the employee's past behavior, anticipate how he or she will react during the meeting and make arrangements accordingly.
- Have internal resources from your local personnel office available to assist the employee with employment counseling, unemployment compensation, and benefits after the meeting.
- Have a planned opening statement that will set the tone for the meeting and establish an atmosphere that recognizes the intrinsic value and worth of the individual. However, do not resort to a fully scripted or "canned" presentation. The statement should provide a clear message of the purpose of the meeting, including the fact that it is not to argue the merits of the case and that the employee will have an opportunity to respond.

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## REMOVAL SESSION

This session normally only involves the manager who issued the removal and the employee being removed. However, the employee may request to have a union or management organization representative present. If so, grant this request.

**SPECIAL NOTE:** If the removal is performance related and there has been no prior feedback to the employee about his or her performance, the removal should be reconsidered by the manager and his or her superior. Specific articles, depending on the bargaining contract, provide for immediate action under the circumstances listed in those sections.

Following are some guidelines in administering a removal session:

- The choice of where to conduct the removal session is critical. The room must allow for privacy as well as personal security.
- If there are more participants in the meeting than the manager and employee, do not set up seating so the employee appears to be placed in an “inferior” position.
- Make an opening statement that establishes the purpose of the meeting and the flow of the proceedings and sets the tone of the meeting.
- Briefly and simply clarify the issues that led to the removal. Avoid value judgments and cite the documentation supporting the decision.
- Deliver the removal letter and make sure the employee understands it.
- If the employee is resistant and argumentative, it is best to not end the meeting until the employee has had an opportunity to vent his or her feelings, as long as the comments are not threatening or abusive.
- Do not raise your voice; this only tends to encourage the employee to do the same and could lead to a violent reaction.
- Ensure that the employee returns any postal property such as keys, identifications, etc.
- Summarize the meeting to be sure the employee understands all the information and answer any questions.
- Document what transpired as soon as possible after the meeting.

#### **THINGS TO AVOID AT REMOVAL SESSIONS**

- Giving personal statements or answers that could be viewed as personal opinions.
- Disagreeing with or responding negatively to an employee’s request to see a lawyer or any other assertion of legal rights.
- Making comments about your own sadness or discomfort with the removal; it may be perceived as hypocritical.
- Offering advice about how the employee should handle the removal or his or her emotions.
- Allowing outside interruptions or phone calls.

- Bringing food or drink to the session; it gives the appearance of being too casual about the meeting.
- Negotiating or debating with the employee.
- Maintaining a harsh or disengaging attitude.
- Making statements that contradict USPS policy and procedures; noting agreement or disagreement with the decision; or suggesting someone else made the decision.
- Attempting to counsel, restrain, or subdue an emotionally aroused employee. Do not touch the employee.

## EMPLOYEE RESOURCE SESSION

If conditions permit and it is geographically possible, the manager should arrange to have an employee resource session immediately following the removal session. Explain to the employee that the session will help with the changes in his or her life and provide information regarding pay benefits and address other concerns. If the employee is not agreeable to participating in a resource session, attempt to schedule the meeting on a date and time convenient to the employee.

If the employee wants the resource session that day, **the manager should not be a participant** in this session. When the session is completed, the employee is to be informed that if there are questions after the session, to contact human resources and not the manager. This removes the manager from any further contact with the employee.

When the session is over, the employee should be asked if there is anything else to discuss relative to resources. Do not debate concerns or get into the merits of the removal action. Conclude the session with a short simple statement such as "I think we have covered all the necessary points." Avoid small talk, or making any statements that might create false expectations.

## ASSESSMENT

In order to derive the greatest benefit from experiences with removal and resource sessions, the manager and their resource personnel should reflect upon and assess the process, including:

- Improving manager's own behavior in future sessions.
- Identifying discrepancies between the manager's values and attitude compared to actual behavior under the stress of the removal sessions.
- Determining the effectiveness of the resource session and what can be done to improve it.
- Assessing if the preparation for the session was useful in responding to questions or reactions of the employee.
- Assessing if the session was conducted professionally and if the employee was treated with dignity and respect.

The manager or support personnel are not to share with others any information that transpired in the resource session that is personal or confidential to the employee and has no impact on the removal action or how future sessions are conducted.

## **Effective Session Skills**

**GUIDE** the direction of the discussion by stating the USPS position clearly, rationally, and nonjudgmentally. Allow the employee an opportunity to respond.

**MONITOR** language and behavior. Be sensitive to the kind of messages being communicated by verbal and nonverbal behaviors (e.g., posture, facial expression).

**REDIRECT** discussions that wander too far from the mission of the meeting.

**OBSERVE** the employee's behavior carefully. The employee most likely will be upset, but watch for extreme or uncharacteristic reactions regardless of your history with the employee.

**END ON A POSITIVE NOTE** regardless of past history with the employee. Provide as much support as possible; avoid making promises that cannot be fulfilled. If appropriate, shake hands, but don't force it.

**FOLLOW-UP** if there appears to be basis for concern about a potentially violent reaction immediately contact the appropriate resource EAP, Inspection Service, Threat Assessment Team, and/or local police.

## Summary of Key Points

### BEFORE DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS

- Communicate and interact with all employees.
- Observe warning signs and be mindful of inappropriate behavior.
- Practice preventative techniques.
- Give timely feedback to improve performance.

### IF REMOVAL ACTION IS NECESSARY

- Contact all available resources.
- Plan the removal session.
- Follow prescribed guidelines to conducting the session.
- Observe warning signs of a potentially dangerous situation.

### AFTER REMOVAL SESSION

- Provide benefit resource counseling for employee.
- Notify appropriate personnel if appearance of potentially dangerous situation exists.
- Conduct post-analysis of the process.