

HR Insights

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Conducting a Remote Termination

Terminations aren't easy, and the current pandemic is causing new challenges for the process. Conducting terminations in-person may be the standard procedure for many organizations, but with more employees working remotely than ever before, an in-person termination isn't always feasible—or might be logistically impractical. When conducting remote terminations, having an effective process in place can ease this difficult task and reduce risk for an employer. This article offers considerations for conducting a remote termination.

Employers should ensure that those involved with terminations are aware of all applicable laws. The considerations outlined in this article are not legal advice. Laws and guidelines related to terminations may vary by locality. Employers should consult with local legal counsel for any termination-related issues.

Remote Terminations

In some cases, an organization's remote employees might live near a local office. In others, employees may be geographically distant—which can create cost, time and logistical challenges for both the employees and the designated managers or HR professionals conducting terminations.

Due to the transformation of the workplace, employers who support remote employees should become comfortable completing a termination remotely. This likely won't be a one-time event, so by creating an effective process, employers can mitigate risk and ease the process for all involved. Having a clear termination process in place can help ensure that you part with employees on the best

terms possible and insulate your organization from legal trouble.

Virtual Platforms

Employers should consider what their appropriate platform is for a remote termination, such as a teleconference or video call. Video platforms such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom have become common in many workplaces. They can provide transparency as to who is present for a meeting and allow for nonverbal communication from participants.

While these benefits have led to organizations utilizing video platforms for anything from interviews to hosting internal meetings, the same can be said of conducting terminations. Regardless of the platform your organization ultimately uses for a termination, this event isn't the time or place to experiment or learn how to use new technologies—so ensure that you take time to prepare accordingly.

Remote Termination Considerations

When creating a process for remote terminations, employers should consider what actions to take in preparation for the termination, during the meeting and after letting the employee go.

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Preparing for a Remote Termination

When preparing for a remote termination, steps to consider include:

- **Setting up a meeting**—Ensure varying time zones are accounted for, as participants may be joining from various locations. Include the employee who will be terminated, HR and the employee’s manager—as including all necessary participants can eliminate the need for multiple conversations and ensure that the affected employee’s questions and concerns are addressed.
- **Reviewing your internal practices**—Review your company’s policies to ensure strict compliance. Ensure that your organization’s termination practices and guidelines are followed.
- **Proactively involving IT**—Before conducting remote terminations, communicate with IT about removing the terminated employee’s access to internal networks at the appropriate time as well as other necessary IT actions. As you won’t be able to collect equipment immediately, it will be necessary to conduct IT tasks remotely.

Proper preparation and advance actions can help ensure that remote terminations go as planned.

Conducting the Remote Termination

When conducting a remote termination, steps to consider include:

- **Announcing all participants**—Ensure that the employee being terminated is aware of all participants present for the meeting.
- **Addressing benefits, severance and vacation pay**—Be sure to let employees know what will happen to their benefits, including but not limited to:
 - Health insurance
 - 401(k) or other retirement accounts
 - Health savings accounts (HSAs) or flexible spending accounts (FSAs)

- COBRA eligibility and details

Clearly communicating the status of their benefits upfront may help reduce the number of follow-up questions employees have. Terminated employees will also be curious about payouts, including:

- Severance payouts
- Vacation payouts

Seeing as you won’t be able to present any physical documents, the termination meeting is the appropriate time to address topics related to total rewards with the impacted employee. Make sure to address follow-up materials that an employee will be receiving electronically or via mail.

- **Addressing work responsibilities and tying up loose ends**—This is the appropriate time to discuss any projects the employee is working on and ensure that necessary information, intellectual property and updates are passed along to team members, or uploaded securely to a team site or drive, rather than saved to the employee’s computer.
- **Discussing follow-up actions with the employee**—The termination meeting is also the correct time to discuss any required follow-up actions from the employee. Ensure that the terminated employee is aware of what this process will look like, and has the necessary resources to complete any required tasks. These may include:
 - Returning any proprietary documents or information
 - Returning company equipment
 - Requiring signatures—completed via next-day delivery, or electronically

For an easy return, an employer can send overnight prepaid self-addressed packages and mail for the employee to return equipment and documents, and provide any required signatures. However, be careful that these packages and documents do not arrive at the employee’s home before their termination.

By thoughtfully planning for how to conduct a remote termination, employers can ease the process and help prevent risk.

Effective Remote Terminations

For organizations supporting remote employees, remote terminations may be a new reality. Effective planning can help employers initially launch this process—and facilitate an effective process for use when necessary.

For additional remote workplace resources, contact AHERN Insurance Brokerage.