

Carl O. Hilgarth's Commentary on "Informing Employees About Layoffs"

Commentary On
Informing Employees About Layoffs

I

Under no circumstances should notification of a layoff be delayed or withheld. Layoffs are never pleasant. There is no gentle way to announce them. The timing their announcement is never right. While the layoff will dampen the holiday, waiting until the day after Christmas to call the affected employees so not to ruin their holiday is absolutely stupid. Consider the impact if they learn about the layoff second hand. It's better to have a tempered holiday with the knowledge of the layoff having been received first hand.

Tony should contact the affected employees as the vice-president instructed and give the bad news personally. While he has the whole afternoon to contact them, he should do it as quickly as possible since some employees may be leaving town and for others the layoff can alter holiday or post-holiday plans. Thus, he must make every reasonable effort to notify the affected employees, even to the point of tracking them down and keeping a log of his contacts. The credibility and integrity of the company is at stake. Deliberately withholding the information for any reason can violate a collective bargaining agreement, cause an unfair labor practice complaint to be filed, or result in legal action against the company.

II

Well, Tony decides not to be a Scrooge and spoil Christmas. So, he plans to wait until the day after to tell the affected employees. Assuming that Tony notified the employees, Mr. Raskin the vice-president, makes a special point of expressing his regrets to Ralph, one of the laid-off workers at the Christmas Eve church service

they both attend. The shocked look on Ralph's face makes it obvious to Mr. Raskin that Tony has said nothing to Ralph. Later in the evening, a very angry vice-president calls Tony.

At this point, Tony has no excuse for not doing as he was instructed. He must tell Arnold Raskin why he did not inform his unit of the layoff as he was directed. While this conversation is going on, Ralph may be calling his co-workers asking them what they know about the layoff, exacerbating the situation. Now it is even more imperative for Tony to notify his unit of the layoff immediately. In delaying the news, Tony hasn't made it a happy holiday for anyone.



At the last minute on Christmas Eve, Shirley Vandermere makes a non-refundable \$500 deposit to secure reservations for a surprise European trip with her husband. Had Tony notified his unit of the layoff as directed, he probably would have called Shirley before 4:30PM. I doubt if she would have then secured the reservations since she was very concerned about the non-refundable deposit, if her husband would even be pleased with the idea, and with the surprise. Now she'll be (to put it mildly) very upset after making the non-refundable deposit for a trip to learn that Tony deliberately delayed notifying her about the layoff. And, she has a triple surprise for her husband: her layoff, the non-refundable \$500 deposit, and a trip they may not be able to take because of the loss of her income.