

## How Not To Handle a Layoff

As organizations continue to eliminate jobs, media attention is focusing not just on the layoffs, but also on how the layoffs are being handled – or mishandled. Horror stories abound. For example, scores of employees at the beleaguered accounting and consulting firm Arthur Andersen recently found out they were being laid off in a voice-mail message that ended: “Please keep your chins up. You did nothing wrong.”

Human resource specialists and communications experts say informing workers of their fate so abruptly and impersonally is a major blunder. According to John Challenger, head of the outplacement firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc. of Chicago, “You owe it to employees to talk to them in person. To do it by voice mail or e-mail is avoiding responsibility to treat people in a humane way.”

Most companies do speak to employees face to face. More than two-thirds of laid-off employees are notified in a meeting with their supervisor, according to a national survey. Twenty percent find out in group meetings, five percent from a human resources employee and five percent in writing. Three percent hear the bad news in a voice mail, conference call or by word of mouth, or have no formal communication, according to the survey conducted by the Society of Human Resources Management.

Forward-thinking organizations recognize that layoffs have important communications implications. Doing it right – ensuring that every employee who will be laid off gets the news in an appropriate manner – includes giving careful thought to how you’ll reach every individual, including those who are traveling, out sick or on vacation when the announcement is made. Remember that no printed or electronic message can compete with a human being’s ability to make a personal connection with another individual. And in the emotionally charged environment of layoffs, your role as a manager is not to distance yourself from the subordinate you are laying off, but to connect with him or her – as difficult as that task may be.