

DR. LOIS FRANKEL

Get and keep the job you want.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF TERMINATION

1. **Thou shalt coach before firing.** Except where there has been an egregious infraction of company policy (theft, firearms in the workplace, or threat to the safety of others) when termination is immediate, you should spend time helping the employee to understand where his or her performance is lacking and what steps can be taken to bring it up to company expectations. This ensures the employee won't be surprised if a termination ultimately ensues.
2. **Thou shalt document everything.** Performance reviews, e-mails related to coaching sessions or agreed upon goals, written warnings, and even your own notes may be needed to support the decision to terminate. Should a lawsuit result, documentation will also help to protect you and the company. Just remember, even if the notes are not in the employee's personnel file they are still discoverable in court so keep them factual and objective.
3. **Thou shalt not "lay-off" poor performers.** In some situations, if you lay-off an employee there is the reasonable expectation that he or she is eligible for re-hire. When terminating for cause, call it what it is. If you've done due diligence around coaching and progressive discipline it shouldn't come as a surprise.
4. **Thou shalt follow company precedent and termination policies.** Companies have been found liable for wrongful termination where they failed to follow their own policies around discipline and discharge. To protect yourself and your company from unwarranted liability be sure you are treating this person the same as you have treated others who were similarly situated. If you're not sure, consult with your corporate or outside labor counsel.
5. **Thou shalt not fire in anger.** It's better to send the employee home with pay and let him or her know you will be investigating the situation than to fire on the spot. This gives you time to review past policy, precedent, and gather facts.
6. **Thou shalt not fire on Friday.** When an employee is fired on a Friday this leaves the entire week-end for him or her to stew over the situation and plan revenge – legally or with more aggression. Firing on a week-day enables you to direct his or her energies toward beginning an immediate job search.
7. **Thou shalt allow the employee to leave with dignity.** Terminations should be done in private, in a neutral location (not your office or the employee's office), and be witnessed by one other member of the management team. Arrange for the employee to clear out his or desk before or after hours with a member of management present. If it is financially feasible, the employee should be provided with a separation compensation package that takes into account his or her years of service with the company.
8. **Thou shalt provide the employee with resources.** The sooner the terminated employee finds a job the better it is for the company. If possible provide outplacement services, a career counselor or help with resume preparation and job search.
9. **Thou shalt not provide a written letter of reference.** These often become smoking guns in lawsuits ("if I was so bad, why did he say these nice things about me?"). Instead, assure the terminated employee that you will provide a neutral reference that includes his or her job title and dates of service. Make this a company policy so that everyone who leaves the company – on any terms – is given the exact same kind of neutral reference.
10. **Announce thy decision.** Rather than let the rumor mill run rampant let the people impacted by the termination know that Joe or Jane is no longer with the company. Tell them you are not at liberty to discuss the facts, but that this person was treated fairly, his or her departure was not a surprise, and that anyone who leaves the company will also be treated fairly and with respect. This puts the rumors to rest without bad-mouthing the terminated employee.