

New York Shooting a Grim Reminder for Employers August 2012

The termination of employment can be shocking and traumatic and, in the most extreme cases, can lead to tragic events. Last week's shooting at the Empire State Building - when a terminated employee shot a former colleague - is a grim reminder of this reality. While, in that case, the shooting occurred several months following the termination, this isn't always the case. The tragedy reminds us there are proactive steps an employer should consider to minimize risk when terminating an employee at any time.

Be Prepared

- Meticulously plan the termination meeting: know what you are going to tell the employee and anticipate the questions you are likely to be asked. Do not allow yourself to be drawn into a debate about the merits of the decision to terminate.
- Reserve a quiet and private space in which to meet with the employee. In most circumstances there should be two company representatives at the meeting. If possible, meet during non-work time to avoid the employee having to face co-workers immediately after the meeting.
- Do not rush the meeting – the employee may have questions and/or need time for the news to sink in.
- Expect an employee may become emotional. Respect the terminated employee's privacy and dignity.

Provide Resources

- Consider having outplacement or counselling services available and on-site. These services can be a resource for terminated employees as well as others in the workplace who may feel anxious about their future employment.
- Provide information about applying for Employment Insurance and, where appropriate, offer an employment letter.
- Offer a taxi to take the employee home.

Security

- Consider having a security officer on-call or in the workplace on the day of a termination(s).
- Ensure applicable employees know who to contact if they feel at risk, inside or outside the workplace.
- Contact police immediately if there is any possibility of violence.

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