

## Breaking the Furlough News Effectively

*Furloughs can be your friend, or foe, depending on how you break the news to employees. Make sure to avoid furlough fallout by communicating it the right way.*

Furloughs, or unpaid time off, can be a good way to cut labor costs and avoid layoffs during an economic crisis. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the number of furloughed employees was 6.5 million in June, whereas the year before was 3.7 million. While furloughs can save jobs, bad communication could cause employees to be dejected and worried, lower morale and even decrease productivity. Breaking the news to employees effectively is a delicate process, but there are ways to ensure a smooth implementation.

### **Communication is key.**

Early, frequent, clear and honest communication is your best asset. Meet with employees face to face and let them see that you're involved and available. The best way to stop rumors is to be as direct and candid as possible. If employees don't think you are being completely honest, they will assume you are hiding something and imagine the worst. Provide information on every aspect of the furlough, from working hours to expectations to benefits information. Explain how to qualify for unemployment benefits if that is available in your state.

### **Give employees flexibility.**

As long as it does not affect your business, allow employees to have flexibility with their furlough. If possible, let employees choose their days off so they can schedule around childcare needs, vacations, or personal projects. This will let furlough be more like a benefit that allows employees to have more control over their time.

### **Continue to acknowledge great contributions.**

Even if times are tough, it's important to continue to show appreciation for excellent work. This doesn't have to be costly, and it can make a big difference in employee morale. Think about inexpensive options such as writing a personal note acknowledging specific contributions or qualities that you are especially glad to have on your team. When people feel respected and believe their good work is noticed, they will be much happier coming to work and feel more motivated to perform their best.

### **Emphasize the positive.**

Many full-time employees often feel that they don't have enough time outside of work to do what they really want to. Furlough can be their chance to finally start a hobby, travel, and spend time with family and friends. Many restaurants and entertainment venues even have special offers and deals geared towards furlough employees. Encourage employees to maximize the benefit of more free time and share ideas with each other about how they are spending their time off.

**Be an example.**

Be genuinely positive. People can feel fear and uncertainty from a distance, and they are especially nervous during tough economic times. Make every effort to be a strong leader who exhibits a positive, clear-headed attitude in everything you do. Having a strong, encouraging leader is worth more than you might suspect. If people trust you and your leadership, they will feel more secure, which will help them focus on work and not uncertainty.

Furloughs can be a good way to weather a bad economy without having to lose staff; if you can communicate effectively and maintain positive relationships, furloughs will be perceived as a benefit instead of a punishment.