



*and Compassionate*

## The **SMART** Guide to Reducing Your Staff

# *and Compassionate* **SMART** Reductions in Staff:

**S**

Address **SPECIFIC** details affecting the people involved.

**M**

**MEASURE** meaningful outcomes—beyond just the company's bottom line.

**A**

**ATTAIN** positive results, even through a difficult season.

**R**

Attend to the **RELEVANT** threat to your brand from negative social media exposure.

**T**

Empower separated employees through a **TIMELY** transition with the use of dedicated career coaching.

**S M A R T** = *compassionate*  
outplacement transitions

Your Guide

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## Strategy Matters

Companies don't decide on a whim to downsize or restructure. They're honest about where they are, they're hopeful about where they could be and they make thoughtful decisions about how to bridge that gap.

Despite careful planning and goal setting, though, most workforce reductions don't help companies move forward. Why? **Because they underestimate how their decisions will affect people.**

Job loss is among the top five life stressors, and the decision to reduce your staff doesn't affect only your business' bottom line. It affects real people: individuals losing their jobs, their families, managers delivering the difficult news, remaining team members and, if not handled with great care, potential employees, investors, vendors and customers. Yes, strategy is important. But if individual lives become just another bullet point on a how-to list, your business and your people will suffer.



Fortunately, with compassionate strategies in mind to appropriately address the needs of everyone involved, your company can ***emerge from a difficult season with a new spirit of resilience, tenacity and optimism.***

This eBook will equip you to develop a process that's both people-centered and **SMART** (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and timely) to help everyone move forward.

**Outplacement services**, when viewed as ***a strategic and compassionate initiative***, will empower everyone involved and protect your company's brand.





## SPECIFIC

### People-Centered Planning

#### **Staff reductions involve multiple moving parts.**

You've made gut-wrenching decisions about who's being let go, HR has drafted severance agreements and your legal department has assessed compliance with federal labor regulations\*.

Those are all important and necessary pieces of the process. But here's another one: *Who's bringing the tissues?*

As your company reduces its staff, even the smallest of details matters. With adequate preparation, you can keep an eye on all of those moving parts in a way that's empowering to everyone.

*Merely 25% of organizations have a*  
**formal offboarding process** in place.<sup>1</sup>

\* While these considerations are beyond the scope of this eBook, they're no less important to your overall strategy. It's essential to involve your HR team and legal experts as you prepare for your reduction in force.





## PEOPLE-CENTERED PLANNING

### Planning Tips

**As you develop your SMART plan for reducing your staff, be as specific as you can in addressing the following details.**

*What other considerations come to mind in the context of your company's culture?*

### *Where will notification meetings happen?*

- + Find a private setting for your notification meetings, and schedule them in the best interest of your separated employees. Avoid meaningful dates, such as birthdays, wedding anniversaries or religious holidays, and consider delivering the news early in the week so they have time to take immediate next steps.
- + Think through logistical details, such as when and how separated employees should clean out their workspaces, for how long they'll have telephone and computer access and if they'll be permitted to send goodbye messages to staff and clients.
- + At the end of the notification, tell the employee what they should do next (e.g., "Please go see Sherry to help you pack your belongings and return your laptop to me before you leave."). They'll feel shocked and unsure of what to do, and providing specific steps and timeframes is critical.
- + Consider having your outplacement services partner onsite on notification day for additional support and direction.





## PEOPLE-CENTERED PLANNING

### *Who's handling the notifications and how will they be equipped?*

- + Provide the notifying manager—which should be the separated employee's supervisor or department manager—with talking points before their first meeting. Be sure the notifying manager offers thanks for the separated employee's work. Emphasize that the decision to reduce staff was based on a variety of factors that were related to the business. If separated employees see your decision as for the company, rather than against them personally, they're more likely to remain brand advocates. (See pages 15-17 for more insight on protecting your brand following a reduction in force.)
- + Adequately train notifying managers by making sure they have a basic understanding of the reasons for the layoffs, helping them think through appropriate answers to likely questions without criticizing the decision or the company. Offer suggestions on how to deal with various emotional responses.



## RESOURCES

- + [Strategic Planning Checklist](#)
  - + [Manager Notification Checklist](#)
  - + [Reduce Risk, Protect Brand & Champion Your People Webinar](#)
- + Prepare a written notice for notifying managers to give the separated employees, along with additional resources (e.g., severance details, COBRA information and forms, documentation for unemployment benefits applications) and a list of company services (e.g., Employee Assistance counseling). Make sure they can describe the outplacement services available and that they have related written materials to pass along to the separated employees.
  - + Provide a confidential list of separated employees to your outplacement services provider, along with level of program and eligibility date.



48% of companies that offer  
outplacement programs report having  
mostly **“highly engaged” employees**

60% in all compared to U.S. national average of 34%<sup>1</sup>

#### PEOPLE-CENTERED PLANNING

### *How will separated employees be empowered to move forward?*

- + Explain other career opportunities within your company, if applicable, and provide specific next steps on how to pursue them.
- + Offer complete outplacement services.  
*For a thorough exploration of how to support and empower separated employees through outplacement services, see pages 12-14 and 18-20.*

### *What will you do to retain your workforce moving forward?*

- + As soon as all separated employees have been notified, hold a briefing with remaining team members. Be prepared for a wide range of emotional responses: confusion, fear, guilt and anger are common.
- + Develop a “going forward” plan that offers remaining staff a clear direction. They’ll need to understand the reorganization, how it affects the mission and future direction of your company, how separated employees’ responsibilities are being redistributed and whom they should contact with questions and concerns.
- + Periodically review how the separated employees have moved forward in their careers with your outplacement services provider.
- + Consider scheduling “change management” workshops with core employees who would benefit from an opportunity to grieve, re-frame and focus on the company’s new vision.



## MEASURE

### Meaningful Outcomes

You've drilled down on specific plans for your reduction in staff, paying particular attention to the people affected by the process. But what's the purpose behind all of those plans? How will you know if you've achieved that purpose? How will you *measure* that?

(Hint: "We let go the 12 people we said we were going to let go" is an incomplete metric.)

As you develop SMART and compassionate plans to reduce your staff, **set aside the metrics describing your bottom line**. Why? You've already attended to those—when you determined whom to let go, the associated savings from salary packages and the investment you're making in outplacement services.

Now it's time to focus on measurements that show how well you've helped your company and your people *move forward*.







## MEANINGFUL OUTCOMES

### *Consider metrics such as:*

- + After notification meetings, what percentage of your managers will report feeling adequately prepared and equipped for those conversations?
- + How many separated employees will pursue other opportunities within your company?
- + Within what time period will your exiting employees successfully transition to a new job?
- + How many of your separated employees will engage with the outplacement services you're providing to them?
- + How many of your remaining employees will participate in post-notification sessions?
- + Over the next three months, how many negative social media reviews will your company receive? How many positive ones?
- + Of your remaining employees, how many will still be with your company six months from now? What about 12 months from now?
- + This time next year, how many high potentials and high performers will have advanced in their careers with your company?



ATTAIN

## Positive Results

### *from a Reduction in Staff*

Let's be completely honest: Being let go is brutal. Rarely will a notification meeting end with, "Thanks, boss. I needed that," and it's impossible to tease out what's worse for the employee—the financial implications or the emotions.

But there's good news, here. By engaging in outplacement services, separated employees can move forward into a future bright with possibilities—and so can your company. With a knowledgeable partner by your side, you can successfully navigate the entire process.

### Completing a RIF that actually *benefits*

separated  
employees



remaining  
employees



your  
company

is a completely *attainable goal.*





## POSITIVE RESULTS

### *Five Essential Components of Successful Outplacement Services*

- 1 Tailored Plan.** No two organizations are exactly the same, so it's critical to set aside cookie-cutter approaches to outplacement services. You need a strategic partner who will help you craft a customized plan that addresses your unique needs—both now and into the future.
- 2 Innovation.** An outplacement strategy that doesn't harness the power of technology is incomplete. Online tools for job search, career and skill assessment, interview preparation and trend research are the gateway to your separated employees' new direction.
- 3 Personal Approach.** At the same time, you're not reducing a staff of robots. You're working with real people who will benefit most from the one-on-one support of a dedicated career coach. *(See pages 18-20 to learn more about career coaching in the context of a reduction in force.)*
- 4 Staying Power.** Reducing staff is best viewed as a large-scale project—one that demands attention before, during and after notifications occur. Successful outplacement services will see the process through until your separated employees have successfully transitioned and your company has fully recovered.
- 5 Social Savvy.** It doesn't take long for fear and negativity to spread through a company in the wake of a reduction in force, and those conversations don't just happen around the break room water cooler. A thorough outplacement services strategy will help you protect your brand's reputation, which ultimately protects your remaining staff. *(See pages 15-17 for more on social strategy.)*





More than 90% of individuals  
***successfully transition*** while engaged in  
IMPACT Group's outplacement program.

#### POSITIVE RESULTS

“IMPACT Group's leadership team is genuine, and  
***I feel they honestly care about my organization  
and helping our employees.***”

— Corporate Client, Insurance Company

“IMPACT Group is professional, timely and  
amazing to work with. ***They treat our people  
as if they are their own.***”

— Corporate Client, Healthcare Industry

“IMPACT Group has provided 13 years of  
great service. ***Their outplacement offerings  
have provided results for our employees.***”

— Corporate Client, F500 Financial Services Organization



## RELEVANT

# Nothing's More Relevant than Social Media

In the age of Facebook and Glassdoor, savvy companies must attend to the very present threat of a media-based brand implosion following a reduction in force.

It doesn't matter how long you've been in business, how many "big" clients you have or how many offices you have around the country. Word-of-mouth communication is swift and powerful, and your brand is vulnerable. Just ask the now defunct Circuit City<sup>2</sup> and British retailer HMV.<sup>3</sup>

Even if negative media reviews don't hurt your bottom line (at least not right away), those reviews may affect the caliber of talent you acquire in the future. Seventy-six percent of people research potential employers online<sup>4</sup>; you certainly don't want high-potentials being turned off by damaging online reviews.

By approaching your reduction in force with a combination of strategy and genuine compassion, you can maintain—and even improve—your brand's reputation among exiting employees, remaining team members, future talent, investors, clients and vendors.

Your brand's first line of defense against a post-layoff media disaster is a compassionate outplacement strategy.





## BRAND THREATS

### *Take Care of Your Separated Employees*

In the business world, there are few things more destructive than a disgruntled ex-employee with a Facebook account. The key to helping your separated employees move quickly from disgruntled to empowered is to provide them with outstanding outplacement services. They'll likely still post a status update about being let go, but because they know you care about their future, they probably won't try to take your brand down with them. Envision the words and phrases you want separated employees to use when they talk about your company's brand. What support will it take to make this a reality?

### *Communicate Well with Retained Employees*

As soon as you've conducted your layoff notifications, your next step must be to communicate the changes to your remaining team members. Regardless of what you say, they'll experience a whole range of emotions: guilt, anxiety, relief, fear and more. By explaining the services you're providing to their departing coworkers, you'll help keep morale and productivity high—along with the overall sentiment about your company. Be transparent about why the layoffs occurred, but add plenty of optimism into those conversations. You retained those employees for a reason; don't lose them to unnecessary panic and a loss of confidence in your brand.

Job candidates under 40 are 61% more likely to relate job consideration with **employer brand**.

Furthermore, **turnover rates** are 28% lower if a company has a reputable brand.<sup>5</sup>





## BRAND THREATS

### *Pay Attention to What's Being Said Online*

Some of the most important conversations happening about your reduction in force are the ones around the virtual water cooler—the Internet. You can't manage your online reputation unless you know what's being said about you, so redouble your monitoring efforts:

- + If any of your separated employees are administrators for your company's social media accounts, make sure you have a clear and intentional plan for when their access will be cancelled.
- + Set up Google alerts with your company's name combined with words like fired and layoffs.
- + Check for reviews on Glassdoor and Indeed and even Yelp.
- + Ask your retained employees to give you a heads up if they see anything questionable.
- + Consult with your company's marketing team to determine if and how to respond to negative social media attention.

Companies that leverage  
**outplacement programs** are

**64%** more likely to



*create*

*promote*

*monitor*

***their employer brand.<sup>1</sup>***



## TIMELY

### *The Secret Sauce of Timely Outplacement Services:* **Dedicated Career Coaches**

Transitions can be painful, and the faster everyone reaches resolution at the end of a staff reduction, the better. In this section, we'll talk through the secret sauce of outplacement strategy, particularly in regard to the time it takes your separated employees to land a new opportunity: career coaches.

#### **GOING ABOVE AND BEYOND**

When you think about how to best support people during a reduction in force, your first ideas may be related to severance packages and COBRA plans. Those are certainly important, and they help your separated employees survive being laid off. But a truly compassionate approach to reducing your staff will help them thrive—and that requires more than pencil-pushing and paperwork. If you're truly interested in helping separated employees move forward, giving them access to a career coach is crucial.

Job seekers who use search assistance are  
2.67x  
***more likely to find a position.***<sup>6</sup>





## CAREER COACHING

### Effective Outplacement Career Coaching

In today's technology-driven culture, finding and landing a great new position is a complex process. Gone are the days of paper applications, and in-person, one-on-one interviews are being replaced by panel interviews conducted over Skype. People who haven't engaged in a job search for a number of years can be easily overwhelmed and discouraged by these changes if left on their own. A career coach can help them navigate the process with confidence.

IMPACT Group's career coaches are an essential element of your **SMART** and compassionate reduction in staff. *Among our candidates:*

**98%** would recommend IMPACT Group to others

**91%** stay in same locale

**52%** expand their horizons in a new industry

**35%** change careers

### Effective outplacement career coaching is:

- + **Individualized.** Separated employees must know they have a dedicated partner to help them through their transition.
- + **Personalized.** Coaches should be carefully matched with exiting employees based on their unique needs, the coach's area of specialization and geographic location.
- + **Accessible.** Coaches should offer real-time assistance, making themselves available to your transitioning employees as needed.
- + **Equipped.** Needs assessments, skills tests and job leads resources are necessary components of an effective transition plan, and coaches should be experts on how and when to use them.
- + **Patient.** Transitioning employees should be permitted to navigate the process at their own pace.
- + **Resolute.** Coaches must be dedicated to providing support and resources until the separated employee has successfully transitioned to a new opportunity.



IMPACT Group has a proven record of helping people move forward in ***half the time of the national average.***

“ ***My coach provided 5-star, 10 out of 10 service during my outplacement process.*** This paid huge dividends in dramatically improving my résumé, narrowing down my target company list and networking to find advocates at those companies. I have heard mixed reviews regarding outplacement experiences, however I could not be more pleased with mine.”






“ This is the third time I have worked with an outplacement provider. IMPACT Group is HEAD & SHOULDERS above what I experienced in the past. They were active and not passive in truly helping me. I felt a strong bond with my coach. ***She was genuinely interested in helping me advance and grow.***”

“ ***Having a life line during this difficult time was a welcome relief.*** One of the biggest benefits was collaborating with my coach on interviewing techniques. He provided fantastic coaching for second round, in-person interviews. I was told I completely blew the interviewers away.”

# and Compassionate **SMART** Staff Reductions

Reductions in force are difficult for everyone involved. But by developing a SMART and compassionate plan, you can empower your company and your people toward success—both retained talent and those who are being let go.

## **SMART and compassionate staff reductions:**

-  + Address **specific** details affecting the people involved.
-  + **Measure** meaningful outcomes—beyond just the company's bottom line.
-  + **Attain** positive results, even through a difficult season.
-  + Attend to the **relevant** threat to your brand from negative social media exposure.
-  + Empower separated employees through a **timely** transition with the use of dedicated career coaching.

From pre-planning and notification day support through transition assistance for separated employees, IMPACT Group is your step-by-step partner as you reduce your staff.

**To learn more about our employee-centric approach  
to Outplacement Services, reach out to us today:**

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# Moving Careers **FORWARD**



## ABOUT US

IMPACT Group is a WBE-certified global leader in outplacement assistance, relocation support and leadership development solutions. We unlock career potential and empower talent with the knowledge, skills and tools they need to move their careers forward.

IMPACT Group assists leading companies around the world by coaching employees through every career transition. No matter where your business is located, our global reach enables us to support downsizings big and small around the world. Partner with an industry expert to ensure your reduction in force goes as smoothly as possible for everyone at your company.



## CITATIONS

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- 6 The Effectiveness of Job Search Interventions: A Meta-Analytic Review, *Psychological Bulletin*, 2014 [↗](#)



