

WHAT HAPPENS TO THOSE WHO STAY: A SIMPLE GUIDE TO HELP THE REMAINING EMPLOYEES AFTER LAYOFF

AN OFFICIAL CLIENT UPDATE OF PT HEADHUNTER INDONESIA



"I heard the news about your company. Are you okay?"

"The layoff in my company does not impact me. I should be relieved, but I am overwhelmed by many emotions when I see my colleagues leaving."

"I'm sorry for what you're going through."

"Thank you. I am confused about how the senior leadership team made the decision. Those who get laid off work as hard as the employees who stay."

That was the short conversation I had with a good friend whose company is currently going through a massive layoff. As a headhunter, I have also encountered similar discussions with potential candidates who are experiencing mixed emotions as they slowly see their colleagues being let go. But at the same time, they can still keep their jobs.

Those mixed emotions are closely related to "survivor guilt," -a symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder when a person survives a traumatic event, but others don't. Experiencing a massive layoff, undoubtedly, is traumatic. When it occurs, understandably, much of our focus is invested in those who are heavily impacted-whose jobs are suddenly removed. However, from what I have seen, it can also be a traumatic experience for the remaining employees.

PT HEADHUNTER INDONESIA

HEAD OFFICE

MENARA PALMA, 12TH FLOOR
JL HR RASUNA SAID KAV X-2 NO.6
JAKARTA 12950 - INDONESIA
TEL: +62 21 2939 1284
FAX: +62 21 2939 1222

SURABAYA OFFICE

PAKUWON CENTER, 23RD FLOOR
JL EMBONG MALANG NO.1-5
SURABAYA 60261 - INDONESIA
TEL: +62 31 6000 3367
FAX: +62 31 6000 3105

- EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP
- CORPORATE CULTURE
- EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT
- TALENT ACQUISITION

CARE. FRIENDLY.
PROFESSIONAL.
DELIVER RESULTS.



Like my friend, many remaining employees might start to wonder: What is the future of this company? If I survive this time, will I get laid off next month? Why did I make it, but they didn't?

Intriguing [research](#) from Leadership IQ, a leadership training and employee engagement survey firm, tells us that the surviving employees will not work harder out of gratitude. The study says that 74% of employees who kept their job amidst a corporate layoff say their productivity has declined, and 64% of surviving workers say the productivity of their colleagues has also declined. Aside from the decline in productivity, through the research, the remaining employees also experience uncomfortable feelings such as anger, anxiety, and guilt.

The study mentioned above can be startling evidence for companies, especially for leaders. They are entirely wrong if they think the remaining employees will be fine, relieved, and productive in the immediate aftermath of layoffs.

Because of that, companies can't just expect everything to be the same. They must support the remaining employees to regain their spirit to contribute to the company's good. There are several supports that the company can provide to its current employees:

Transparent Communication

A. Company's future

First and foremost, leaders need to acknowledge and legitimize those complex emotions that remaining employees feel. Take your time with them to think about work. According to [Ed Batista](#), Executive coach in San Francisco and a Lecturer at Stanford Graduate School of Business, "If the leader runs too far ahead or pulls too hard to bring people along...there's a rupture between the leader's vision of the future and everyone else's current reality, and the leader loses influence as a result."

At the same time, leaders can start communicating with the remaining employees about the company's current and -most importantly- future situation. Leaders need to tell what steps the company will take to make things better in the future so that the employees feel safe.

Furthermore, the company must always provide the latest information on every policy taken to improve the company's condition.

During a company crisis, communication-when done honestly and transparently-can also minimize unnecessary rumors in the workplace. That way, employees can focus on the things that matter. As a result, they can slowly gain productivity, and the company's business processes can run smoothly.

B. Company's expectation

When layoffs are conducted, of course, there are adjustments that companies must make. The adjustments can be anything, such as the new plan for the company's operational costs, business plan, and organizational structure, and might be job expectations for existing employees.

With these adjustments, the company's expectations of its employees might be altered. Therefore, its leaders must be able to convey their expectations for the existing employees. The message must be clear and explain the purpose of the changes made and what goals are expected. By stating the company's expectations to the remaining employees and giving them clear instructions, employees don't feel confused and can be more productive in their jobs.

Haryo Suryosumarto, the Managing Director of PT Headhunter Indonesia and a Certified Master Coach from Engage & Grow Global, states that *"The key is communication. In principle, all employees have the right to know the company's direction and what policies will be taken that may determine the remaining employee's position in the future"*.

Appreciate their works

Showing appreciation to those who have stayed in the company during difficult circumstances is essential. Remind the remaining employees that what they're doing is important and meaningful to the company. The appreciation doesn't have to be conveyed through gifts, but a simple thank you or being present and sensitive whenever they need help can show that you care about them.

If eventually in the future, the company hires new employees, do not let the old employees feel underappreciated and replaced by their presence. Explain that new hires can help existing employees reduce their workload and they together as a team to achieve the company's goals.

Stay connected

Work and life are highly interconnected. Some of us have found our closest friends from our workplaces. The effect can be emotionally distracting when a layoff happens, and it causes someone we know very closely to be let go.

Jennifer Moss, the author of *Unlocking Happiness at Work*, says, *"Coworkers can become some of our closest friends, making work a trigger for the pain."*

When this happens, leaders must step up and take some action. Do not let employees feel alone and have to bear everything on their own. Involve them in every discussion, whether it's a discussion about work or just a tiny talk discussing hobbies or anything happening outside the workplace. That way, employees who still feel anxious will slowly regain their confidence to keep working and produce a good performance in the company.

Lastly, leaders can encourage them to reach out to former employees and offer some emotional and job-search support, such as reviewing resumes, making networking introductions, and providing references.

Conclusion

Layoffs are painful for everyone. But, of course, there are varying degrees of pain. The ones whose jobs are suddenly removed might be experiencing the most painful experience, especially if the job is the only source of income that can feed their family.

However, what happens to those employees who stay is something that we rarely discuss. They will be relieved as they can still keep the job, but it turns out otherwise. They deal with mixed feelings of emotions that can be detrimental to their productivity, which in the end, can be harmful to the company as well.

Companies, especially the leaders, can't rush the remaining employees into work immediately after a layoff and expect them to be productive.

In most cases, employees will work through these feelings with time, but efforts to rush them can be counter-productive for everyone.

Before anything else, leaders need to acknowledge the mixed emotions those employees experience.

While at the same time, leaders can start gradually giving clear guidance to employees about the necessary steps that they must take to make the situation better.

Lastly, showing appreciation to those who remain in the company must be a daily practice that leaders do.

WRITTEN BY ROCHMAH SRI LESTARI
DESIGNED BY SHABRINA SEPTIANDINI



ROCHMAH SRI LESTARI

Researcher
PT Headhunter Indonesia