

THE FIRST HOUR CHECKLIST

# 7 Things HR Leaders Get Wrong in the 60 Minutes After a Separation

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Most organizations have a process for the decision to let someone go. Almost none have a process for what happens in the 60 minutes after that conversation ends.



## ⚠ MISTAKE #1

# The Employee Is Left Alone Immediately After the Conversation

The moment the news is delivered, someone walks out. The manager returns to their desk. HR moves to the next task. And the employee sits in a conference room, in their car, in a stairwell, processing one of the most destabilizing moments of their professional life with no one present and no structure for what comes next.

Leaving someone alone in that first hour is not neutral. It communicates, loudly, that the organization's involvement ended the moment the decision was delivered.

## ⚠ MISTAKE #2

# Next Steps Are Delivered Before the Person Can Hear Them

HR professionals often feel compelled to immediately explain severance, COBRA, equipment return, and off-boarding timelines. This information needs to be communicated. But the first 10-minutes after the news lands is almost never the right time.

## What Should Happen Instead

Someone should make contact within the first 60 minutes. A coach, a counselor, a designated support person. Not hours later. Not the next day.

## The Problem

The person in front of you is in shock. They are not processing logistics. They are trying to understand what just happened to their life. Information delivered too early lands nowhere and often needs to be repeated anyway.

## What Should Happen Instead

Pause after the news. Let silence exist. Give the person a moment before moving to next steps. A written summary of logistics is more effective than a verbal download they cannot absorb.



# There Is No Plan for What Happens If the Employee Becomes Visibly Emotional

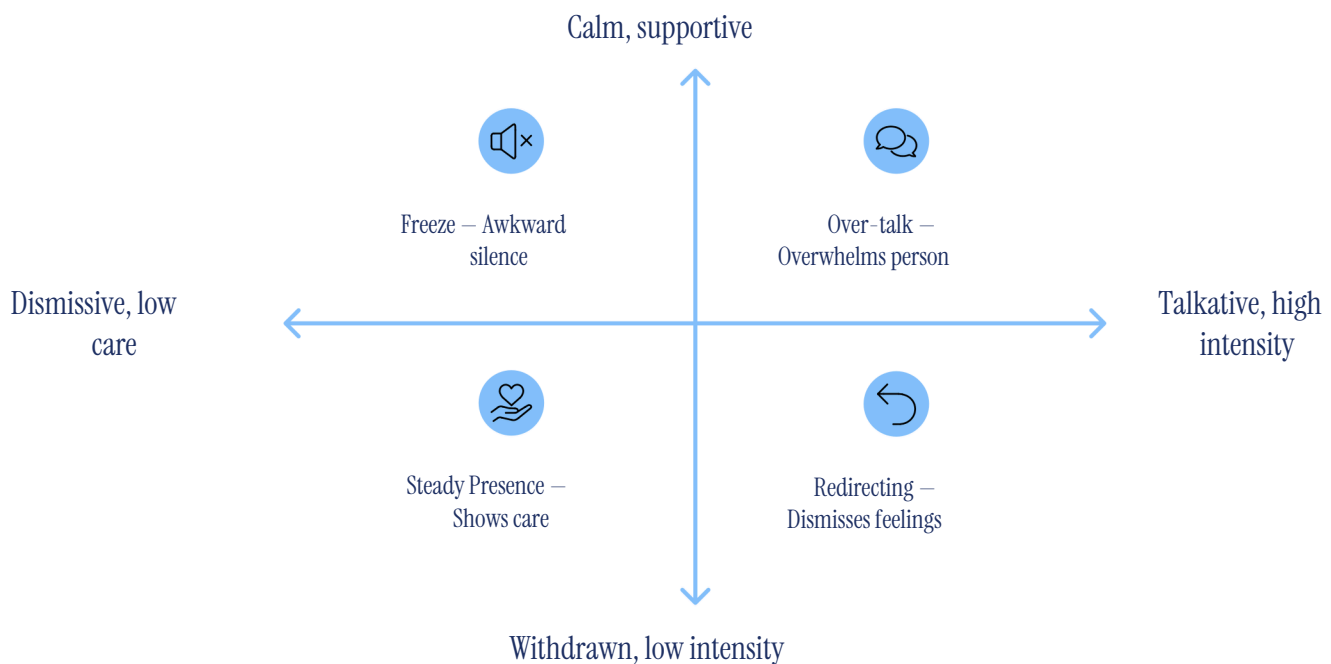
Most exit conversation training focuses on what to say when everything goes smoothly. Very few organizations prepare managers and HR for the moment someone cries, expresses anger, or shuts down completely.

When that happens — and it often does — the person conducting the conversation frequently freezes, over-talks, or becomes defensive. None of those responses help. All of them make the moment harder for everyone.

## What Should Happen Instead

Prepare in advance for emotional responses. Know what to say when someone is in shock. Know how to stay grounded when someone is angry.

Silence and steady presence are almost always more effective than words.



Preparing for emotional responses is not a soft skill — it is a core competency of responsible offboarding practice.



#### ⚠ MISTAKE #4

## The Manager Has No Support for What They Feel After the Conversation

Exit conversations take a toll on the people who deliver them too. Managers often return to their teams immediately after conducting a difficult separation, expected to lead normally, perform normally, and carry the emotional weight of what just happened alone.

### Dis engagement

Unprocessed cumulative strain from conducting exits shows up as withdrawal from team leadership responsibilities.

### Avoidance

Managers begin to sidestep future difficult conversations, letting problems fester rather than addressing them directly.

### Credibility Erosion

Over time, the emotional weight of unacknowledged exits quietly undermines leadership presence and trust.



A brief check-in from HR after a difficult exit conversation is not indulgent. It is responsible leadership.

#### ⚠ MISTAKE #5

## The Remaining Team Hears Nothing — or Hears the Wrong Thing

After an exit, the people who stayed behind are watching. They are paying attention to how leadership communicates, what is said and what is not said, and what the experience of their departing colleague says about how they themselves would be treated.

### Say Nothing

Employees fill the silence with assumptions — often darker than the reality. Trust erodes quietly and quickly.

### Say Too Much

Sharing details compromises confidentiality and creates new anxieties among the people who remain.

### Say It Right

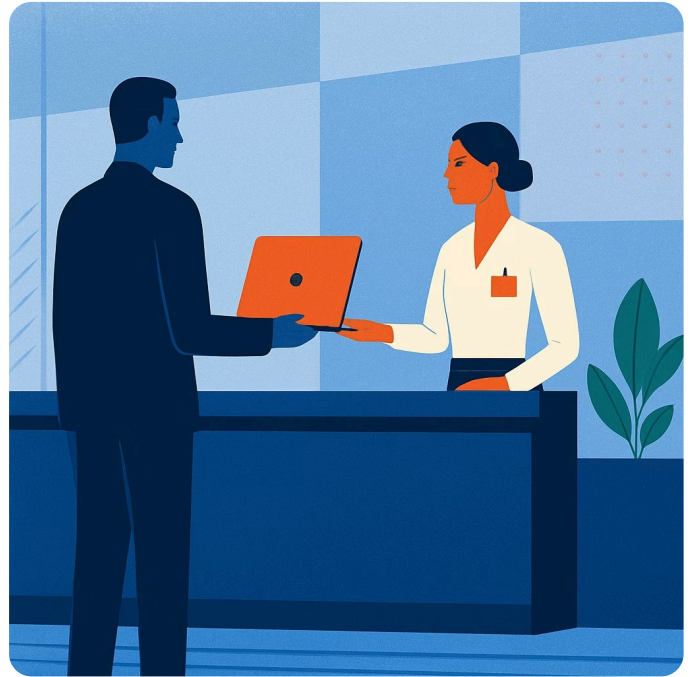
Communicate briefly, respectfully, and within the same day. Acknowledge the change. Express care. Do not over-explain.



# The Exit Process Treats the First Hour as a Logistical Event, Not a Human One

Badge collection. Equipment return. System access removal. These are all necessary. But when they are the primary focus of the first hour — when a person's last experience of your organization is defined by what needs to be reclaimed from them — the message is unmistakable.

The logistics matter. The order in which they happen matters more. Organizations that front-load the administrative process send a clear signal about where their priorities lie.



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## Human Support First

A coach or support person makes contact. The person is acknowledged as a human being, not a departing asset.

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## Then Logistics

Equipment, access, and paperwork follow — after the person has had 30 minutes to process what just happened.



The equipment can wait 30 minutes. The person cannot.



# No One Follows Up in the 24 Hours After the Exit

A brief, personal follow-up within 24 hours costs almost nothing and signals something significant. It can come from HR, from a coach, or from a designated support contact. It tells the former employee that the organization's care for them did not end the moment the decision was delivered.

It also dramatically reduces the likelihood of a Glassdoor review that begins with the words *"The worst part was how they treated me after."*

## What Should Happen Instead

A simple personal message. Not a legal disclaimer. Not an automated email. A human note acknowledging the weight of what the person is navigating and offering a point of contact if they have questions.



### Personal

Written by a human, addressed to a human.  
Not templated, not automated.



### Within 24 Hours

Timing matters. A message sent days later signals that the follow-up was an afterthought.



### Offers a Contact

Gives the former employee somewhere to turn with questions, reducing anxiety and legal risk alike.



# The Thread Running Through All Seven

Every one of these gaps has the same root cause. The exit process was designed for the organization's needs, not the employee's experience. The decision was planned. The first hour was not.

well transitioned was built for exactly this window.



## 60-Minute Activation

A dedicated coach reaches the departing employee within 60 minutes of the exit conversation — before they've left the building.



## Six Full Weeks

That same coach stays with them for six full weeks. Same person, start to finish. No portal. No hotline. A human being.



## Rapid Activation

No contract. No upfront payment. Invoice after delivery. Zero friction when it matters most.

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No one should have to stand in that parking lot alone

