

Emotional Fallout from Redundancy

Several of my Human Resources clients in the last week have come to me with nightmare redundancies, where the employee being made redundant has lashed out and filed a Personal Grievance against their employer. Demands are unrealistic, around the \$100k mark, and they are causing horrendous amounts of stress for everyone in their vicinity, as they go through the DOL mediation process and beyond.

Why did they come to me? Firstly, because they know that I provide Conflict Coaching, and they were hoping that I could help. We soon realised that, although they desperately needed the redundant employee to attend Conflict Coaching (to talk about their motivation for the PG), the situation had escalated to the point where there was no trust left; and attendance at coaching sessions is voluntary. We came to the conclusion that it would have been much more constructive and pro-active to offer conflict coaching at the same time as the redundancy was announced, as part of the package, paid for by the company.

Redundancy threatens the status and livelihood of most employees, and it comes as a huge shock. Companies have prepared themselves for the process, and the facts and figures involved; but very rarely does the company prepare the employees for the emotional fallout that comes with it. This inevitably leads some of those employees to react aggressively with a PG, or other demonstration of their hurt and anger. The traditional method of dealing with this is to hire an excellent lawyer and go through the Dept of Labour mediation, tribunal, and Court - processes which only serve to further alienate the two sides, and entrench them in their positions.

What is the alternative? By offering Conflict Coaching as part of the redundancy package, it allows the employees the chance to vent their frustrations in a safe, confidential environment. The coaching process guides each individual to reflect firstly on their own behaviour, then on the behaviour of the employer, before brainstorming options for how to move forward, evaluating those, and choosing one to prepare for. The coach listens carefully and asks just the right questions so that the clients achieve insights, clarity, and empowerment to manage the situation themselves. It is an incredibly practical process, and can have amazing results.

Redundancy usually leaves people feeling disempowered: some will react in anger; others in shame. People often receive it as a personal attack on their competence, rather than as the result of changes in the economic environment. For all it will be a turning point in their life; and how they manage that transition will depend on:

- how competently they handle their own emotions,
- how clearly they can see their path forward, and
- how empowered they feel to take those steps.

Conflict Coaching works on all three levels, supporting both the employer and the employees to manage the redundancy process with dignity.

By Fiona White



Fiona White has the ideal manner for a conflict resolution practitioner – calm, patient, and a very good listener. She asks just the right questions to empower her clients to find their own solutions.

With over 20 years professional experience in education, management, commerce, industry, recruitment and customer care in the UK, France and New Zealand, Fiona has a great understanding of the costs and benefits of conflict. Her mission is to share her conflict resolution knowledge and skills as widely as possible. Fiona is based in Auckland (New Zealand), where she has her own Mediation and Conflict Coaching practice - *Mediation Matters* - and holds a 'Conflict Clinic' one day a week at the local Citizens Advice Bureau. She enjoys a balance of community and commercial work.

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