

The difficult but important task of letting someone go

"In any moment of decision, the best thing you can do is the right thing, the next best thing is the wrong thing, and the worst you can do is nothing."

— Theodore Roosevelt

By Christopher F. Earley



There are few things harder for me than letting go of someone who is not working out. This is, however, just a necessary part of running a successful

practice that must be done from time to time.

If someone has to go and you delay the inevitable, you are stalling the growth of your firm — and that person's growth as well. That is not fair to that person, and it does not reflect strong leadership.

Here are some things to keep in mind if you are faced with the hard decision of whether or not to let go of someone.

• Making the decision

I call this the litmus test. If you are being really honest with yourself when evaluating your team members, the test of whether someone is working out is simply to ask yourself: Would I enthusiastically re-hire this person again?

Brutal honesty is needed here, and there is no middle ground. The answer to this simple binary question will give you clarity on whether someone is either helping you or hindering you.

Christopher F. Earley is a Boston attorney and author who concentrates his practice on the representation of the seriously injured and their families.

If it is the former, then continue to make sure that person is growing and thriving. If it is the latter, you at that point can decide either to kick the can or to be proactive and make the necessary change for your firm.

• Having the conversation

It is unquestionably an uncomfortable meeting when you have to sit down with the team member to let the person go. I always make sure to have a witness present and to get right to the point.

I begin the conversation by telling the person I have given great thought to the decision and have decided that he or she is no longer a good fit for the firm and would be a better fit some-

place else. This is not the time to rehash the past or to argue. Being blunt and straightforward is really important here.

I believe in fair and generous severance and will briefly describe the severance offered. If done right, the entire conversation should be no longer than a few minutes.

• The aftermath

You will find great relief that you made this decision. Your existing team members will probably wonder what took you so long. At the same time, the departing team member will likely realize that he was not a good fit for the position and that he can thrive and be better suited at a different company.

You made a hard decision, but that hard decision instantly and positively impacted the lives of others. That is a hallmark of true and genuine leadership.

No one ever enjoys letting go of someone, but it must be done when it is necessary. Reach out to me at cearley@chrisearley.com if you have other thoughts on this difficult but very important topic. **MLW**

EARLEY ON
practice management