



The HR Manager's Guide to

# Outplacement



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## What is outplacement?

Outplacement is practical support from professional consultants designed to help people who have to leave a company, whether through redundancy or severance, move to the next stage in their careers.

Organisations often provide outplacement to help people through individual or large scale job redundancy, or significant corporate change. Typically, outplacement is either carried out one-to-one, or in group workshops.

All outplacement programmes, whether group or individual, are designed to help people cope with the prospect of job change, and make positive moves forward.

Outplacement consultants help the individual to focus on the options available to them, and to make the right choices for their future. Practical help will include preparing a CV, writing covering letters, how to find vacancies and apply for jobs, networking, interview skills, and advice on settling into a new job.

## Why use outplacement?

All companies face change at some stage, whether on a large scale or just involving individual members of staff. How you handle that change can have a profound effect on your corporate image and employer brand.

Using outplacement at times of change within your organisation can help to smooth the process for all those involved. There are 3 key reasons to use outplacement:

- Helping those who have to move on
- Helping those who stay
- Making the process simpler



## 1. Helping those who have to move on

Outplacement helps people come to terms with the shock of losing their job, and helps them move on quickly and positively to a new role. Outplacement helps people to choose their next direction and prepare themselves for the job market, and guides them through the process. While no outplacement company can guarantee jobs for all its candidates, outplacement puts people in a much better position to find their next job quickly.

Turning the redundancy process into a positive move forward is good for the individual, and helps your reputation as an employer among those who have to move on.

## 2. Helping those who stay

Change can be difficult for the 'survivors' too. Seeing their colleagues receive positive, productive support can lessen anxieties and build loyalty among the rest of the organisation, and enhance your reputation internally.

Employee morale suffers during times of uncertainty and change - showing people that the company intends to look after them regardless of what the future holds is a powerful way to counter this.

## 3. Making the process simpler

When outplacement consultants are involved in the process early on, they can help to guide you through the practicalities. This can relieve pressure from you and your team, and avoid making costly mistakes. Employees receiving outplacement support are often less likely to seek redress against the business.



## What does outplacement include?

Outplacement involves a professional consultant working with an individual or a group to help them to prepare for the task of finding a new job.

Everyone's first thought is usually "Is my CV in good shape?" but it's better to start from "Where am I now and where do I want to be?" - outplacement should provide an individual with the opportunity to reflect a little and look at all the options available.

Candidates then move on to work on CVs, look at how to find opportunities (including the often misused tactic of networking), application letters, working with recruiters etc.

Outplacement also helps with planning for and handling interviews – in fact, anything involved in the job finding process is part of the outplacement programme.

It's not only about finding jobs, though. Many people decide to set up their own business, return to study or travel the world. Outplacement companies should provide support and advice no matter which direction an individual may choose.

Outplacement doesn't give any guarantees of a new job - but it will equip candidates to look for the right jobs, in the right areas, and be confident that they can present themselves well, both on paper and at interview.



## Contents of a typical outplacement programme

### Reflection

Where do I want to be?

Where am I now?

Review of skills, experience, working style, lifestyle choices, career options, preferences

### Preparation

CV and covering letters

### Finding opportunities

Finding vacancies, networking, speculative applications, using the internet, agencies

### Applications and interviews

Answering adverts, application letters, application forms, interview skills and preparation

### Alternative options

Retirement, starting your own business, education

### Next steps

Settling into your new job The



## Different levels of support

It is likely that you will want to offer different levels of support to different people within your organization. Levels of support commonly available include:

Group workshops

One-to-one

Executive

Where candidates work with their consultant in small groups  
Where candidates spend individual time with their consultant  
Often aimed at senior management, these programmes generally offer much more one to one time as well as other research and support services

Flexible providers will also offer tailored options which involve a mixture of the above. For example, you might choose to support employees via a group workshop, followed up by individual surgery sessions with an outplacement consultant or on-site job shops. In addition, most group workshop programmes will offer individual follow-up support by telephone and/or email, to allow the candidate to raise individual issues and get personal support.

Many providers these days also offer online tools and resources. These can be invaluable in helping candidates to make a quick start to their job search process. They provide background information and useful tools which will allow the candidate to make process in between meetings with the consultant.



## Who gets which level of support?

### 1. Seniority

Many companies will choose to offer different levels of support to different employees. Most commonly this will be based on the individual's level of seniority, with the most senior employees receiving executive or one-to-one support, and more junior staff being supported via group workshops.

### 2. Other reasons

However, there are also other issues which might affect your decision to provide a higher level of support. For example, individual support can be extremely helpful:

- Where you have a very long-term workforce who have not been in the job market for some considerable time. These candidates will benefit from greater support as they will not have recent experience of job hunting, preparing CVs and handling interviews.
- Where an individual has personal circumstances which make the situation more difficult, organisations often like to provide more individual support to help the employee through the change.



## How to manage the process

### Plan early

Like all business projects the programme needs to be properly planned in advance. Without proper preparation, 'at risk' employees can quickly become disenchanted. Instead of being viewed beneficially, the company's motives may be misinterpreted and resented, resulting in dissatisfaction for all and impacting upon the general morale of your organisation.

Outplacement should be taken into account from the very beginning of your restructuring discussions. Early decisions on who will be offered outplacement and what budget is available will make the process simpler to implement as you move through the change programme.

### A joint process

Involve your outplacement provider from the start and agree a joint roll-out process. Everything should be in place by the time your selection process is complete. We recommend that you:

- decide on levels of support as early in the process as possible
- agree in advance an introductory letter explaining what outplacement is and how it will help, which can be given to all affected employees during their initial discussion
- make sure your managers are trained and briefed, not only on how to manage the initial meeting with the employee, but on how to explain outplacement, why it is being offered and how it can help
- nominate a single point of contact to work with your outplacement provider
- agree how and when the outplacement company will make contact with employees – early contact with a skilled consultant will considerably ease the process at a difficult time.



## Getting Feedback

A professional outplacement company should relieve you of the necessity to be involved on a day to day basis, allowing you to devote your time to handling the other issues within the business at a stressful time. However, many HR managers ask for regular reports from their outplacement company, which might include:

- update on candidate progress
- candidate feedback statistics

## Confidentiality

Note that it is essential for an outplacement company to keep their work with the candidate confidential, but they should be willing provide general feedback such as "Chris has completed his CV and now has 3 interviews lined up" rather than giving details of discussions with particular companies. This level of confidentiality is important to build trust between the candidate and the consultant.

## Candidate Feedback Form

Candidate Name:

Consultant Name:

Start date:

Report date:

CV completed?

Interviews attended?

Overall progress?



## Managing the outplacement process - flowchart

### Key Actions

PLAN WELL

EARLY CONTACT IS BEST

LET YOUR OUTPLACEMENT

PROVIDER TAKE THE STRAIN

WORK HARD ON COMMUNICATIONS WITH ALL

AGREE METRICS TO MEASURE PERFORMANCE

AND SATISFACTION

### Sequence of Events

Decision to restructure involving job losses. Make the business rationale clear in communications

Contact your outplacement provider as soon as possible

Consider joint planning meetings to discuss needs, preferences & implementation

Communicate effectively to all employees, whether at risk or not using established in-house briefing processes. Don't forget those on holiday, different shifts or absent.

Decide on desired outcome, method of feedback and contingency plans

### Details

Ensure full compliance with legal issues and that your selection process is demonstrably fair. Also be sensitive to the impact on morale of your actions  
Agree nature of support, venues, timing and duration. Who will initiate contact with employees? How soon? Jointly develop the roll out plan.

Your provider should relieve you of some of the pressures involved at a time when other issues compete for your attention and should nominate an account manager

Talk to employees on an individual basis and ensure that managers are fully informed about outplacement support with agreed scripts. Introductory sessions or standard letters can be provided as part of the support package

Ensure that a positive message is delivered about outplacement help and that your company sells this enthusiastically to maximise



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## What to ask an outplacement provider

To help select the right provider for your business, there are a number of things you should find out. These include:

- What is their track record?
- Where are they based?
- Can they operate in the areas you need them to?
- If you have a lot of people being affected, is the company big enough to handle the volume of candidates successfully?
- Do they have experience of working with people in your industry?
- Are they able to demonstrate the competency and experience of their consultants?
- Do they have online support available as well as face to face time?
- Do they have offices that employees will travel to or will the consultants come to you?
- Are they prepared to negotiate on budget and tailor their service provision so that it fits exactly what you want, or is there a more off the shelf approach?
- Can they give references from previous satisfied customers?
- How do they monitor quality standards and candidate feedback?



## Buying outplacement - what you need to know

There are a number of decisions you will need to make when you decide to appoint an outplacement provider. Having this information to hand in advance will make it quicker and easier for you to gather quotes.

### Available Budget

The most important decision is what budget you are able to spend. In reality, this is going to guide the decision you go on to make about the number of people you are able to help and the level of support they will get. Most outplacement providers will offer different levels of support to fit your budget. As a general rule the more budget you have available, the more tailored, individual and long-term the support for your employees will be.

### Checklist

Having the following information to hand will make the process of getting quotes much more straightforward, and will help you to get accurate prices from your chosen providers:

- What is your overall budget
- How many people will be affected?
- Where are they based – in one place or multiple locations?
- Do you want to give different levels of support to different levels of seniority?
- Are there any other reasons why individuals might need a higher level of support?
- What are your timescales - notification dates, leaving dates



## Looking after the survivors

Redundancies create a stressful situation for everyone involved, including those who remain. How you handle this difficult time will affect how quickly the 'survivors' are able to move on in a positive way.

Remember that those who remain will have lost friends as well as colleagues, and will be worried about what the future holds for them and their jobs. Seeing their colleagues well supported and making good progress in the outside world can help to reassure people that the future may not look so bleak after all.

After losing a number of staff through redundancies, keeping hold of the key staff who remain becomes even more important. Make sure that you:

- Keep people up to date with what is happening and make it easy for them to ask questions
- Make sure everyone understands why the redundancies were necessary and that your selection procedure was fair
- Look after your key staff and make sure that they feel supported and secure in their future with the company – this can be an ideal time to introduce new career development and training programmes for those who remain.



## Getting the best from your outplacement provider

### Plan well, and plan early

The sooner you set the process in motion, the better the end result. Redundancies create a very difficult time for the individuals involved and for the business around them, but outplacement can turn this into a positive move. The sooner this happens, the sooner the negative feelings are removed.

### Let your outplacer take the strain

Allow your outplacement company to take on as much of the work as possible, freeing you up to work on other things. This might include the initial contact with candidates, scheduling workshops, and providing feedback.

### Get the communication right

Outplacement works best if those involved understand its benefits right from the start. Let them know what is available immediately, explain why it is helpful, and make it clear that this is impartial, confidential advice designed to help them move on to their next job as successfully as possible.

### Appoint a single point of contact

Experience demonstrates that it is always beneficial for you to nominate a knowledgeable contact from within your business to work with your provider, to help when queries and issues crop up...as they invariably will.

### Offer the highest level of support that your budget can afford

It goes without saying that the more support the individual gets, the faster and more successfully they are likely to move on. Be very wary of programmes which offer internet-only tools and support – the personal support of a professional consultant, whether via a group workshop or one to one, is invaluable in making progress.



## A different approach to career change and development

We hope you have found this guide to managing the outplacement process both useful and informative. Change processes are difficult times but with the right help and support it is possible to create a positive outcome for everyone involved.

Today's approach to outplacement: personal support from experienced consultants, backed up by comprehensive online tools and advice, helping people who face career change or redundancy to move forward with confidence.

Please contact us for a confidential service on 01732 870511