
GAO

**Manager's Guide:
RIF Notification**

Preface

This guide is designed to assist you in preparing for the difficult task of notifying staff that they have been released under our reduction-in-force. It is our intent that everyone involved--including yourself, those to be released, and those who will remain at GAO--feels treated with dignity and respect. How we handle those who are separated can:

- make a difference in how they respond to the news that they are being let go and how quickly they get to a place where they are ready and willing to take constructive action in creating a life for themselves after GAO; and
- send an important message to those who will remain behind and can influence their morale and willingness to contribute to the important work of the agency.

I want you to know of our support for you in this process. As I can attest from my own personal experience in Detroit last year, this can be a very challenging endeavor. I want you to be as fully prepared as possible. Do not hesitate to call on me and others in GAO for any clarification and support you may desire.



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I. RESPONSIBILITIES

Unit Manager : Notify employees they are being separated because of the reduction-in-force (RIF), explain why the RIF is necessary, clarify the finality of the RIF decision, answer questions, deliver the Employee Information Package, refer employees to Personnel to clarify questions and arrangements for pay and benefits, and encourage employees to use the counseling and career transition services GAO is providing through the Office of Counseling and Career Development in Headquarters (HQ) and its contractors in each field office.

Office of Personnel : Administer RIF, provide information and consultations on employee qualifications and benefits/entitlements (e.g., severance pay, retirement, unemployment compensation, health insurance, etc.), complete and process the documentation needed to convey pay and benefits to employees whose jobs are ending. **202-512-6185 & 1-800-219-8045**

Office of Counseling and Career Development (OCCD) : Coordinate and provide counseling and career transition services in HQ. In the Field Offices, arrange for the provision of (1) personal counseling through local Employee Assistance Program (EAP) contractors and (2) career transition services through local contractors. Also, consult with managers in both headquarters and field offices regarding troubled employees, difficult communications, stress management, etc. **202-512-8992 & 1-800-297-4296**

HQ Health Unit : Provide emergency health services if needed. **202-512-5486**

Training Institute (TI) : Arrange for or directly provide classroom/learning center training to upgrade separated employees' marketable skills. **202-512-8674**

Office of Security and Safety (OSS) : Talk with managers about their concerns, and provide names/phone numbers of contact persons and services as requested. **202-512-4700 (In case of an emergency in the HQ building, dial 311; outside HQ, dial 911)**

Civil Rights Office (CRO) : Provide information and services to any employees who may feel discriminated against in the RIF process. Consult with managers on mediation, conflict resolution, etc. **202-512-6388**

Office of General Counsel (OGC) : Consult with managers on legal matters, including personnel law. **202-512-8404**

Unit Operations Staff/Administrative Officer : Conduct regular employee exit process (GAO Form 473 for Separation Clearance), including securing the return of GAO property, credit cards, classified materials, ID, keys, library materials, collect debts owed to GAO, etc. Secure GAO property in connection with people removing their personal property from office.

Unit Career Advisors : Serve as a point of contact between unit APSS staff and OCCD's Career Transition Center (CTC). Encourage separated staff to avail themselves of CTC's services. Provide job search support tailored to unit needs and assistance in preparing resumes and job applications.

II. OBJECTIVES OF RIF NOTIFICATION MEETINGS

1. Notify affected employees of their RIF status.
2. Provide employees with basic information about pay and benefits associated with the RIF.
3. Provide employees with information on, and encouragement to use, the career transition counseling services GAO is providing.
4. Inform employees of next steps in the RIF process, including using outplacement, access to workspace, and the exit process.
5. Treat employees with dignity and compassion.
6. Set the stage for employees losing their jobs to make a smooth transition out of their work responsibilities and GAO.

III. "DOs" AND "DON'Ts"

"DOs"

- 1 Take time to listen attentively, learn what each person is experiencing. Some want to have their say, so let them talk. Listen.
- 2 Remember that reactions of employees are going to be unique and specific to the individuals concerned.
- 3 Have confidence in people's resiliency and strength.
- 4 Acknowledge that losing a job is a BIG life change for almost anyone, a lot to handle.
- 5 Maintain eye contact with the other person; a respectful attentiveness.
- 6 Ask someone who is extremely quiet what he/she is thinking.
- 7 Encourage each employee to carefully review the pay and benefits information provided and contact Personnel for clarification.
- 8 Encourage the employee to use the career transition assistance GAO is providing.
- 9 Assert that the employees' skills and experiences are going forward with them as they reestablish their careers.
- 10 If asked for a reference, say "Yes" if you know you can be supportive.
- 11 Acknowledge to yourself and others that ending others jobs is very stressful. Use good self care and talk over the experience with colleagues/friends.

"DON'Ts"

- 1 Respond to everything that is said.
- 2 Get caught up in a debate, it may only fuel the frustration level.
- 3 Apologize for the RIF.
- 4 Say "This hurts me as much as you."
- 5 Imply the decision is not final.
- 6 Become impatient.
- 7 Imply you disagree with the RIF actions.
- 8 Express hopes or expectations GAO will be able to rehire persons being let go.
- 9 Blame others for the RIF decisions.
- 10 Try to shut down normal emotional responses of others.
- 11 Tell people how they are feeling; e.g., "You're angry!"
- 12 Tell people how to feel ("Don't worry, you'll be fine," " Don't be discouraged.").
- 13 Say "I know how you feel."
- 14 Behave as if nothing has happened after employees have been let go.
- 15 Expect employees to display awareness or appreciation of your concern for them or of your own discomfort.
- 16 Think you should handle a difficult situation by yourself.

IV. EMOTIONAL REACTIONS TO JOB LOSS

A. Table 1: Common, Immediate Reactions to the News of Job Loss

Immediate Emotional Reaction	Observable Behavior
1. Shock	Silence, asking the same question, forgetting
2. Immobilization	Blank look, tears, seeming stunned
3. Disbelief	Shocked questioning
4. Denial	Debate, argument, not hearing the message
5. Anger	Verbal outburst, irritation, hot or very cold expression
6. Bargaining	Pleading, haggling, negotiating to preserve status quo
7. Depression	Withdrawal, frustration, agitation, catastrophizing
8. Grieving	Expressing feelings, thoughts; looking ahead
9. Resolution	Readiness to move on, "So be it", focus on next steps
10. Relief	Letting go, feeling released, decompressing

B. Verbal Reactions to Expect

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 "Why me?" | 10 "I oughta punch your lights out!" |
| 2 "I do my work. What about X? He/she's the poor performer in this group" | 11 "This is only happening because you people mismanaged things. You should be getting RIF notices, not us workers." |
| 3 "Who else is getting the ax?" | 12 Tears of loss and worry. "This is terrible. What am I going to do?" |
| 4 "This is discrimination!" | 13 Silence, no outward expression or comments. |
| 5 "I want to file an appeal. Who do I see?" | 14 "Since you can't keep me I want to look for a position elsewhere in GAO." |
| 6 "You can't do this to me!" | 15 "Can you give me a reference, help me get a job?" |
| 7 "But my spouse is in the hospital and we have two kids in college and we just had to put my Dad in a nursing home!" | 16 "Is the RIFing over now? My friends want to know if they're in danger." |
| 8 "I bet your job is protected. I bet no managers are being fired!" | 17 "This is actually a relief! The uncertainty has been forever and that was really hard. At least now I can move on." |
| 9 "Why are most of the people getting Riffed women and people of color?" | |

C. Job Loss & Transition Stages/Emotions

Some key points based on the film clip on "Understanding Change" are outlined below.

1. **Change**, including job loss, involves

- (1) an ending,
- (2) a transition, and
- (3) a new beginning.

2. **What is lost when a person's job ends?**

More than a paycheck and benefits related to health insurance, pensions, and leave. Job loss typically involves some loss of identity, self-esteem, sense of belonging, status with friends and relatives, and significant relationships. The emotional impact of job loss will often depend on the depth of the person's attachment to the job and what it represents to them.

3. **Emotional stages of loss & transition** typically involve:

- a) **Denial**, shock, disbelief--a person's way of cushioning the blow
- b) **Anger**, rage, hostility--a person's need to blame someone/something; it's natural
- c) **Bargaining**, negotiating, pleading, maneuvering--a person's attempt to hold onto job
- d) **Depression**, sadness, fatigue--a person's second guessing of him/herself and past choices, mourning of loss and what it represents to him/her
- e) **Acceptance**--very strong feelings and mood swings subside; readiness to let go of the past and to move on; the focus moves to beginning anew and making a successful transition

Note: Individuals may go back and forth among stages and emotions, and stages may be skipped

Emotional stages are often experienced by managers and those who remain.

4. It is important to recognize **feelings** and experience them--refusing to deal with them **can delay the transition process**

V. MANAGER'S PREPARATION CHECKLIST

- 1 Review and understand the material in the Manager's Packet--*Manager's Guide*--and the Employee's Packet--*GAO Comprehensive Guide to Career Transition Services*.
- 2 Prepare unit managers to support you in managing the RIF process and delivering a consistent message during the 60-day RIF period while separations are occurring.
- 3 Arrange any additional support desired from the supporting offices.
- 4 Once RIFs start in a unit, all will know. So deliver all notices as quickly as possible (preferably all in one day), and develop a strategy to quickly communicate to the rest of the unit (especially those feeling at risk) that all notices have been delivered. In larger units, consider proceeding by sub-units--e.g., finish notifications for a subunit, and then let subunit staff know all notices for subunit are done so they can relax.
- 5 Ensure all employees being separated have not made travel plans and will be at work the day they are scheduled to be notified.
- 6 Plan what to do if employees to be separated are sick/absent on day of notice.
- 7 Prepare your approach to each meeting: have an outline but don't read the message, rehearse, don't omit, be clear, don't create false hopes, have an exit strategy (keep it moving (7-15 minutes)).
- 8 Don't schedule the notification meetings. Go get (or have someone bring) the employee you want to meet with when you're ready for that meeting.
- 9 Schedule notification meetings early in the day, preferably on Monday (or Wednesday). Notifications on these days will enable individuals losing their jobs to participate in OCCD Career Transition Orientations planned for Tuesdays and Thursdays in HQ. In Field Offices, make final arrangements with OCCD's contract outplacement counselor to provide emotional support and information about the locally provided career transition services. The local EAP/personal counselor could also be contacted if you think additional support is needed. *Notify OCCD (512-8992) before scheduling date for delivering notices.*
- 10 Ensure someone is available to talk with employees immediately after they get notices. OCCD staff will be available in HQ Room 3153. Where applicable, ensure your Unit Career Advisor(s) will be on-site on notification day. Reserve a convenient, "out of the way" room where RIF recipients can go to talk with Unit Career Advisors if they wish. Field Offices will have contract outplacement and/or EAP counselor on-site.
- 11 After notification: (1) in Field Offices, introduce employee(s) to the OCCD contract outplacement counselor who will be on site; (2) in HQ, tell employee where to find Unit Career Advisors and OCCD counselors.
- 12 Be alert for responses from persons whose jobs will continue but are concerned about dismissed employees and the downsizing.
- 13 Plan ahead for rumor control. Be clear what information is private and what is public. Deal with rumors openly and promptly.

VI. THE RIF SEPARATION NOTIFICATION MEETING

A. Suggested Process for the Meeting

The parts of the RIF separation notification meeting, with key talking points, are outlined below.

PART 1: Notification of Separation

- Deliver RIF notice--be direct and human, conveying information in a respectful, businesslike manner
- Quickly review with the employee the content of the employee packet and the GAO services available
- Be prepared to listen
- Ask employee to sign copy of notice, acknowledging receipt--if employee refuses, note date of delivery
- Return all acknowledgement copies of the RIF notices to the Director of Personnel

PART 2: Provide information about pay and benefits

(Office of Personnel talking points)

- Employees cannot be separated from GAO earlier than 60 days from receipt of notice
- Employees may visit Personnel/Regional Manager's designee to review retention registers affecting them
- Information on reemployment will be provided when GAO Order 2330.1 is finalized
- Employees should avail themselves of Personnel's services re qualifications, eligibility, pay, and benefits
- Employees with questions about pay and benefits should contact the unit's assigned Personnel Specialist

PART 3: Provide information on, and encouragement to use, the career transition services

(Training/Transition Services & OCCD talking points)

- We encourage you to devote your remaining time to seeking and preparing for new employment
- GAO is offering training courses and workshops that may be helpful during your career transition--see Training Institute/OCCD catalog and list of contact persons
- **In HQ units:** Tell employees they are invited/scheduled to attend an orientation on the outplacement services available at the GAO/OCCD Career Transition Center tomorrow in Room 3133
- Invite employees to talk with Unit Career Advisors (have room(s) set aside for this)
- If employees would like to talk to a counselor today, invite them to call OCCD at 512-8992 or stop by OCCD in Room 3153--counselors will be available to offer support
- **In Field Offices:** Introduce employee(s) to the outplacement counselor who will be on-site to explain local outplacement services and arrange dates for the first outplacement counseling session
- **HQ and Field:** Let employees know that career resource and training materials are included in their packet. In Field Offices this includes phone numbers for local EAP/personal counseling

PART 4: Inform employees of next steps in the RIF process, including outplacement, access to workspace, and the exit process.

- As a general matter employees will be permitted to devote their remaining time to outplacement and preparing for new employment, but managers can make an exception to this if some time is needed for an orderly hand-off of duties--also, see responses to Questions 3 and 4 on page 15

PART 5: Close meeting

- Acknowledge that losing one's job is a big change, a major transition, and a lot to handle
- Remind employee that their skills, experience, and personal qualities will be going forward with them as they reestablish themselves in a career/life after GAO
- Encourage the employee to reestablish him/herself as soon as possible
- Wish the employee well and, if appropriate, invite him/her to meet again and keep in contact with you

B. Additional Meeting Points to Consider

(Note: The list below includes additional points to help prepare for the meetings. They may be dropped or changed depending on how the unit implements separation tasks. Some points are included to ensure they have been considered in some way by the unit during the period following notification but before actual separation of employees.)

1. Get to the point of the meeting as quickly as respect and courtesy permit. There's not much one can say to soften the blow, e.g., "There is no comfortable way to talk about the downsizing GAO has to do."
2. Deliver clearly and firmly the message that the employee is being separated. Avoid ambiguity. Your message should offer no encouragement to the notion of an eleventh hour reprieve. "Waffling" may create false hopes and drag out the process, resulting in additional anger and frustration.
3. Explain the organizational rationale for the decision; be brief and consistent; e.g.,

The Congress has cut GAO's budget 25%, which requires that we get to a staffing level of 3500 as of October 1996. The GAO management has determined that with a staff level of 3500 we could not afford a support structure in excess of 750 administrative, technical, and support staff. Thus we had to reduce about 200 such support positions.

4. Do not argue or further justify the decision. Repeat the organizational rationale if needed.
5. Expect an emotional reaction. Let the employee express their feelings. Be patient, calm. Don't react. **Listen, listen, listen, listen!**
6. Hand the employee his/her RIF letter and allow time to read it. Answer questions.
7. Notify the employee that he/she may remain on the rolls of the agency for 60 days and will be offered assistance in making a career transition. The 60 days begins ____ and ends _____. After separating, the employee may be eligible to receive severance pay and certain other benefits (see Personnel factsheets or refer them to Personnel: 512-6185 & 1-800-219-8045).
8. In encouraging employees to use the career transition services GAO is providing--
(In HQ such services will be available at the OCCD Career Transition Center, HQ Room 3147. An orientation on outplacement services will be scheduled the day after notices are given at the OCCD Transition Center. Encourage the employee to attend. In Field Offices such services will be provided by contract outplacement counselors. The regional manager should introduce the employee to the outplacement counselor who will be on site to explain outplacement services, and to arrange dates for an outplacement orientation and starting outplacement counseling)--clarify that the employee is responsible for finding his/her new job. Inform them that the career transition services (job search, job development, career planning, resume writing, etc.) GAO is providing are aimed at making their own job search more effective, not to do it for them.

9. If the employee is interested in **retirement**, refer them to Personnel's Retirement Program for annuity computations, eligibility, etc. (HQ Room 1181, 202-512-5902 or 1-800-219-8045).
- 10 Give the employee his/her Employee Career Transition Packet and briefly mention the main topics it addresses. Stress the importance of the Career Transition Guide as a reference on pay and benefits information, career transition services, and training opportunities.
- 11 Point out the 800 phone number hotlines for contacting support units about questions: Personnel (1-800-219-8045) and OCCD (1-800-297-4296).
- 12 Note the employee must visit the unit administrative contact to complete the Employee Separation Clearance Checklist, GAO Form 473, by their separation date. (Make prior arrangement with unit Operations/Administrative staff for completing regular employee exit/separation clearance process--e.g., to collect Government American Express Card, turn in ID, settle accounts with GAO (travel advances, etc.), return GAO property--and let separating employee know how that will be handled in the unit.
- 13 Recover any classified material or other GAO papers and property in the employee's possession. Ensure all GAO data, material, equipment, etc., stays in the office.
- 14 Explain any changes in the employees access to the LAN.
- 15 Verify the employee's home address for administrative purposes.
- 16 Consider how to modify your approach to deal with **non-separation notifications--e.g., reassignments, bumping, retreating**. Such notification meetings will likely stir emotions and reactions, but generally not at the same level of intensity as separation meetings. Any change/reassignment will involve transition issues. These issues will vary depending on the individual and situation.
- 17 When all (separation) notices have been delivered let staff who are retained know that there are no more separations to be announced. It is often useful to walk around the work area, checking with people on other matters. Listen for others responses to the RIF and empathize. Indicate by word and actions that we will experience a period of adjustment as we continue our work and serve our customers.
- 18 Develop a strategy for monitoring and managing the morale and emotional climate in the unit after the RIF notices are delivered. Involve others in the unit to ensure that all the bases are touched, that everyone in the unit--not just those losing their jobs--feels supported.
- 19 Respond to questions (see pages 15-18 for predictable questions and suggested answers).

C. Tips on Dealing with Emotional Reactions

Some common emotional reactions to learning one's job is ended are described below. Each is followed by some ideas for managers on responding constructively.

1. Quiet/Controlled -- Many employees will receive the RIF news thoughtfully, thinking about it before responding. Some employees will be so stunned that they will be somewhat immobilized. They may seem shocked or show no emotion (verbally or non-verbally) and speak very carefully or very, very little. They may outwardly seem to "have everything under control" when inside some may feel stunned, totally at a loss and holding on tightly.

- Respond with questions to learn if this person understands that their job is ended. Clarify any misunderstandings. If necessary, ask them to summarize what they've heard from you.
- Make sure they leave with the written materials confirming their termination and describing the assistance GAO is providing. They may not be taking in your words.
- If they're silent, be patient, give them some time to digest the news. If they say nothing after a minute or two you might say "You're very quiet. I'm concerned about your response to this news and I'd like to hear what you're thinking." Inquire, but don't insist.
- If they remain silent and don't respond to your questions, end the meeting by encouraging them to talk with someone. E.g., "You haven't said anything about your response to this news. I hope you will talk it over with your friends or family, or with a counselor."
- If you are worried about a very silent responder, talk over your concerns with a counselor. Check on how the person is doing later.

2. Angry/Hostile -- Expect some angry reactions. The anger will vary. The "over-reactors" are VERY expressive in letting out their hurt and anger, often verbally and non-verbally. They may walk around, become flushed, use strong gestures. They may blame, accuse or threaten. Another intensely angry response is "ice cold and very tightly controlled."

- Respond with calm and patience. Anger is one normal response to a major loss.
- Don't respond angrily or by trying to close off their angry expression prematurely. Blowing off steam often helps people to get through a loss, let go, and move on.
- Don't debate the appropriateness of the decision, the RIF process, other ways GAO might save money, etc.

- Do ask if they have questions about their separation benefits or about arrangements for job search assistance.
- If the angry expression lasts more than a few minutes, move to end the meeting. Acknowledge their anger as understandable in response to such unwelcome news. Encourage the person to talk it over with their friends/family and/or refer the person to counseling (Room 3153, 202-512-8992).
- Occasionally angry expression leads to threats to harm oneself or others. Threatening behavior may be verbal or non-verbal, overt or implied. While angry behavior usually de-escalates after a few minutes, it may also escalate alarmingly. If so, MOVE TO END THE MEETING AND CALL SECURITY AT 202-512-4700.

3. Confused/Fearful -- Some employees will experience confusion and/or fear. Their responses will vary, including asking a lot of questions, repeating questions, seeming forgetful, mixing up messages, catastrophizing, having trouble concentrating and/or experiencing extreme fatigue.

- Provide clear, detailed information on what is happening and on the next steps they need to take.
- Do not get drawn into possible denial. Be clear that this is REALLY HAPPENING.
- Be patient. Answer even repeated questions. Ask the employee to summarize what you've told them.
- Acknowledge that this is a lot to take in at once, and offer to talk again later.
- In closing the meeting, go over the next steps the employee should take. Emphasize the usefulness of the job search services and when they should meet the counselors.
- Check in later and ask how the job search is going.

4. Taking in the Loss/Adapting -- Many employees will convey a sense of taking the situation in as they experience a variety of responses to loss including denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and eventually acceptance. Their emotional responses will be tempered with being basically in touch with the realities of their job loss and career transition needs. Their ups and downs will be accompanied by a sense of varying but generally forward movement.

- Convey the same patience, respect, and compassion that each person deserves.
- Keep communicating, offering practical support, and acknowledging transferable talents.

D. Tips on Maintaining Security

Managers are sometimes concerned about possible violent or frightening responses from persons whose employment they are ending. Managers should approach such meetings considering their knowledge of each individual to be RIFed. If a manager has reason to think a person they must RIF might react violently it is wise to make some provisions to increase their security. If uncertain, check your perceptions and concerns with others.

A basic step is to call Joel Dwyer in OSS at 512-4700 to discuss the concerns and ask for advice. If it seems warranted, OSS can arrange for security staff to be at or near the meeting site in Headquarters. In Field Offices, talk to your building security staff or, if in a federal building, the Federal Protective Service.

Managers may also want to call OCCD to discuss their concerns, possible strategies and other assistance from OCCD counselors.

Strategies to consider for minimizing risk and increasing one's sense of security include:

- 1 Choose a meeting location where others could hear if a meeting becomes unruly or one calls for assistance. Consider having another manager or third party in the meeting.
- 2 Leave a door open. Make sure someone who could help is near enough to hear you call or look in and inquire if things don't sound right.
- 3 Sit closer to the door than the person you are meeting with. Don't put yourself in a position where you would feel trapped.
- 4 Don't argue or be drawn into extensive explaining to justify the dismissal.
- 5 Stay calm and repeat the main explanation for a RIF being required. Be consistent.
- 6 Don't take another's anger personally; minimize inclinations to respond defensively or aggressively.
- 7 You are not responsible for another's emotions. Don't try to change or "fix" them.
- 8 Sit upright, breath deeply and slowly to evoke a calming response (in you and others).
- 9 Acknowledge the other's observable behavior: e.g., "You're shouting," or "You *seem* very angry right now"
- 10 Terminate the meeting immediately if another's anger becomes frightening to you or they seem verbally or non-verbally threatening--e.g., "This is not a good time to talk. This meeting is over now. Let's step outside." Get up and walk out into an open area at any time you feel threatened. Don't hesitate, move decisively.
- 11 If for some reason you can't leave the room, call others in immediately.
- 12 Prearrange a signal for others to call for security staff immediately. Also, have a phone number for Security by your phone so you can call quickly--311 in HQ or 911 elsewhere.

VII. PREDICTABLE QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTED ANSWERS

1. Why was I selected? Who made the final decision? Was I considered for other positions? Will there be any opportunities at a later date?

The decision was based on the mission needs of the organization (following the studies and recommendations of the downsizing teams and the management of each unit with final concurrence by the lead team and the Comptroller General on which positions to abolish). After determining GAO's needs and jobs to be eliminated, the reduction-in-force was administered by Personnel according to our RIF rules which took into account everyone's tenure, military preference, length of service, and performance. Unfortunately, there are no alternative positions available at present or in the foreseeable future.

2. What recourse do I have?

You may appeal the decision to the GAO Personnel Appeals Board. (Refer to the employee's appeal rights spelled out on the employee's RIF notice.)

3. Can I continue to work for a period of time?

Yes. However, unless you are eligible to exercise your retirement option and/or don't need to find another job, we believe it is in your best interest and GAO's to use your time over the next two months looking for employment opportunities outside of GAO. The career counseling and transition services are being provided for this purpose.

4. When do I have to move out of my workspace/office?

(Situational, prefer not to move people before separation date. Where workspace is not an issue, let staff know that they are free to continue using GAO resources including existing workspace in preparation for their future. However, if workspace and computer resources are in demand, let employee know and explain why).

5. Can I be rehired?

The probability of rehire is very low, and you should concentrate your efforts on finding employment outside GAO. However, you will have reemployment rights which will be outlined when the new GAO Order is distributed to all employees in the March-April timeframe.

6. This seems like a clear cut case of discrimination to me! Aren't most APSS/WG staff women and minorities? Why did we need to RIF in the first place?

We have carefully considered this and do not believe that any discrimination has occurred. The Congress has cut GAO's budget 25%, which requires that we get to a staffing level of 3500 as of October 1996. The GAO management has determined that with a staff level of 3500 we could not afford a support structure in excess of 750 administrative, technical, and support staff. Thus we had to reduce about 200 such support positions.

7. How come no evaluators/lawyers/SES were laid off?

This RIF is only one of a number of things we have been doing over the past year to reduce our budget and staffing levels. About 75% (or 430 of 570) of the nearly 600 staff who separated as a result of our previous staff reduction efforts this year were mission related, banded evaluator staff. Specifically, we have used a three phase approach.

Phase I: Use buyout and early out programs. During this phase, ending September 30, 1995, about 350 staff left (about 240 mission and 110 support)

Phase II: Close three field offices (Cincinnati, Detroit, and New York), effective November 10, 1995. During these closures, about 220 staff separated (about 190 mission and 30 support)

Phase III: Reduction in force of about 200 support staff. Expected that all staff will be separated by mid-July 1996

8. If the RIF is based on agency and budget needs, why didn't GAO even consider firing evaluators/lawyers/SES who make 2 or 3 times as much as me?

GAO's management determined that putting any more such positions at risk of RIF was not in the best interest of the agency and would be disruptive to the GAO's ability to carry out its mission and directly serve Congress. As you may be aware, GAO employed a three-phase approach to this budget crisis. Phase I: Buy out/Early out; Phase II: Field Office Closures; Phase III: A reduction in administrative support. The GAO management determined that at a staff level of 3,500 we could not afford a support structure in excess of 750 administrative, technical, and support staff. Thus, we had to reduce about 200 such positions.

9. Could you elaborate why we needed to RIF?

Last year, the Congress agreed to a 25 percent reduction in our appropriation. In doing so, it was agreed that we would phase in the reduction over a two-year period--15 percent in 1996 and 10 percent the following year. To do this, GAO had to reduce to 3,500 staff--a cut of about 850 by October 1996. In total, this will result in a 30 percent reduction since 1992.

Restructuring is intended to strike a balance between:

- (1) Headquarters mission units;
- (2) Field offices; and
- (3) Administrative, technical, and support organizations, including staff offices.

Projected staff level as of October 1996: 3,500 GAO-wide

- Headquarters units--2,000
- Field Offices--1,000
- Support Offices--500

GAO implemented a three-phase approach to achieve these reductions:

Phase I: Use buyout and early out programs. During this phase, ending September 30, 1995, about 350 staff left (about 240 mission and 110 support)

Phase II: Close three field offices (Cincinnati, Detroit, and New York), effective November 10, 1995. During these closures, about 220 staff separated (about 190 mission and 30 support)

Phase III: Reduction in force of about 200 support staff. Expected that all staff will be separated by mid-July 1996

We expect normal attrition to be about 80 staff in 1996.

10. Will you write a letter of recommendation for me?

Yes (if you want to).

11. I want to talk to Mr./Ms. X (the manager's boss or higher).

Of course you are free to make an appointment to see him/her, but I must tell you that he's/she's fully aware of the decision and supports it.

12. I don't want to talk about this without my lawyer being present.

Of course you are free to have a legal representative contact us. Our present commitment is to help you get reestablished as quickly as possible in something that makes sense for you with the least disruption to your career and family. We strongly suggest that you attend the OCCD career transition briefing tomorrow/(date)/keep your appointments with the career transition counselors. (If a lawyer contacts a manager, refer the call to the OGC Legal Services Division--(202) 512-8404.)

13. How can you do this to me after X number of years?

This budget reduction affected people in a number of functions with varying years of service.

14. You're not going to get away with this! I'm going to get even with you!

I'm sorry that you feel that strongly, but I want to reemphasize that we are committed to help you reestablish yourself in a new position as quickly as possible. I strongly urge you, regardless of your feelings now, to keep the appointment with the career transition counselors. **(Note: If the employee becomes increasingly hostile, you should end the meeting and contact security. In an emergency in the HQ building, dial 311; other places, 911)**

15. Was John/Jane Doe let go?

It is inappropriate to answer questions about other employees; I know you would want the same consideration extended to you.

16. Can I extend my employment beyond the 60 days?

Generally you cannot extend your employment unless you will qualify for an immediate retirement annuity within one year, in which case you can continue working up to the date you become eligible for the immediate annuity.

17. Can I extend my severance payments or get my 60 days remaining salary/severance in a lump sum immediately?

No. Explain that law/regulation does not allow it.

VIII. A FEW SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

1. "The Human Side of Organizational Change" by William Bridges, 1993. (Enclosed)
2. "Dealing Successfully with Personal Transition" by William Bridges, 1987. (Enclosed)
3. "The Eye of the Storm: Navigating the rough winds of restructuring" by Joycelyn Stabler, Journal for Quality and Participation (July/August 1995 issue). Very good on emotional climate in governmental organizations during RIFs.
4. From Downsizing to Recovery: Strategic Transition Options for Organizations and Individuals by Richard Knowdell, Elizabeth Branstead, and Milan Moravec (CPP Press: Palo Alto), 1994. Very good on the whole downsizing and career transition process.
5. Healing the Wounds: Overcoming the Trauma of Layoffs and Revitalizing Downsized Organizations by David M. Noer (Jossey-Bass: San Francisco), 1993. Very good on how to overcome malaise produced by downsizing, with guidelines on how to revitalize downsized organizations with interventions at four levels--(1) process--doing the downsizing right; (2) grieving--facilitating emotional release; (3) empowerment--breaking organizational codependency; and (4) systems--accomodating the new employment contract.