

The ultimate guide to employee offboarding

November 2021



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Introduction

No one ever likes saying goodbye.

When someone resigns from your business, it's easy to feel resentful about it. After all, you've spent time investing in them as an employee, they've done great work for you, and you feel as if they're part of your inner circle. When someone has embodied your company values and has been working towards your company vision, it can be really challenging to accept that they can walk away from all of that.

Although it can feel like a sting of rejection, it really is just another part of being a leader. People resign from their roles for all sorts of reasons, and even a company that has amazing turnover reduction strategies will lose people from time to time.

Following the pandemic, many employees are reevaluating what they want from their working lives. After the shakeup of this dramatic world event, many are embracing the pivot and making big career moves. This has triggered the [Great Resignation](#) phenomenon, which is seeing record numbers of employees resign from their roles; and no workplace is immune.

It's extremely likely that you'll see higher levels of resignation over the next six months, which is why it's so important to put a plan in place for offboarding now.

Having an awkward exit from a job is one of the most universal experiences. Many employers take the resignation personally and turn their back on the person that is leaving the business.

Sometimes the whole event is just glossed over entirely, with the wider team left in the lurch as they wonder why someone left or where they went. This can often create a really unpleasant vibe for all involved, with an us vs. them mentality.

There are two things that employers often forget when it comes to staff leaving the business.

The first is that a considered and courteous offboarding sends a really strong message to the business; we value all employees, no matter where they're at in the employment lifecycle. We can also handle awkward situations with transparency and honesty, diffusing the pressure in tense environments for everyone.

The second is that offboarding is an **opportunity**. It's a chance to get important feedback that could significantly improve your business. It can also influence the leaver's future with the business; a great goodbye has all the better chance of leading to a return down the track. It also makes them all the more likely to become advocates of the business to their friends and professional network.

In this guide we're going to share how you leverage these opportunities by building a robust offboarding process. We'll walk through each step of an offboarding strategy and give you the templates and tools to implement it in your business right away.

There's no time to waste. Let's make your goodbye great.

The Team at Employment Hero



What is employee offboarding?

Let's start by getting back to basics. What should an offboarding strategy involve?

Offboarding is a collaborative process between the resigning employee, their manager, HR and their employer. It covers everything that happens from the employee's resignation through to their final day at the business.

The offboarding process is a combination of administrative, practical and communicative tasks, making it quite a unique part of the employee lifecycle. It will involve a detailed handover, processing a final payroll and entitlements, conducting an exit interview, communicating with the employees' clients and customers, communicating with the wider team and celebrating the employee's achievements with their time at the company.

Not every offboarding will be exactly the same, especially when you look at the two kinds of employee departure.

A **voluntary** departure would see the employee hand in their resignation, with a notice period that was set out in their employment contract, to move onto something new; whether that be a new role at another organisation, to retire, to attend to family matters or any other reason. They have made the decision themselves to move on and are willingly entering into the formal process of resignation.

An **involuntary** departure would see the person's employment be terminated, possibly due to misconduct or poor performance. It could also be a result of them being made redundant. These are extremely difficult situations to tackle as an HR professional or employer, and call for case-by-case considerations for offboarding that should be arranged with an employment law specialist.

It's for this reason that this guide is designed for voluntary departure only.



Why is offboarding so important?

How employers handle staff departures says a lot about them as a leader, and it can have a big impact on the vibe of a workplace. Resignations are emotionally-charged events. When an employee hands in their notice, they are essentially saying that they no longer want to be a part of the business that you've been building.

It's easy to be upset at the fact that one day the person was a trusted colleague and confidant, the next they're planning their exit. But it's really important to know that in most cases it isn't personal, and the person is most likely just doing their best under what is probably a really difficult decision.

Say that an employer takes the resignation really personally. They become angry after the person hands in their notice and gives no guidance on a handover process. They don't communicate to the rest of the team that the person is leaving or make arrangements for what to do after they've left. They treat the leaving person with contempt until their last day, making their last weeks with the person extremely uncomfortable and unpleasant.

This reaction will cause confusion with the wider team, create a tense and unpleasant environment and make leaders seem unapproachable and immature. It can make the team feel nervous and anxious around the boss, as their moods and reactions appear inconsistent. Counterproductively, this reaction could lead to further resignations. Anger, annoyance and contempt can create a toxic work atmosphere, regardless of what's caused it.

When you professionally accept the resignation, however, you can trigger a chain of extremely productive events.

Offboarding is one of the few times that you can seek genuinely honest feedback from your people, during the exit interview process. You can go beyond unpacking why they're leaving, you can also ask for their opinion about any issues or red flags that exist within the business.

It may sound strange, but your departing employee is actually an asset to you. As they have nothing to fear in terms of consequences (they aren't at risk of being fired at this point), they are more likely to be transparent in these discussions. On page 17 of this guide, we'll show you how to conduct this meeting - and we've even included a handy interview template!

There's also another big potential return of a great offboarding process that often gets forgotten, your employee could return to your business in the future.

[Boomerang employees](#) do exist, and it's becoming an increasingly accepted practice in the professional world. Often they leave at a junior level and then return at a higher level once they've gained skills and experiences with other organisations. This hiring and rehiring can be a really positive experience for both parties. Your employee has been exposed to new ideas and skills at other workplaces, but has chosen to return to you; they can apply their new knowledge to a business they are more than familiar with. In other words, your employee left - gained valuable professional and life experiences - and are now bringing that back into the business.

They're unlikely to do this, however, if they have a negative or clunky offboarding experience. So let's make it the best it can be, and reap the benefits.

Effective handovers

In an ideal world, you'll hire someone straight away that can directly take on the leaving person's responsibilities. Or sometimes your leaving person will give you an extended notice period so you have plenty of time to find someone new for them to handover to.

These scenarios are definitely exceptions, however, not the rule.

Most of the time, the leaving person's role will be unfilled for a period of time, meaning that responsibilities must be passed on to other team members and then re-taught to a replacement. In order for a role to be completed to the standard as your leaving team member, a detailed handover is essential.

Whichever the scenario, we've simplified the handover process into four parts.



Allocating responsibilities

One of the first things to consider when your employee resigns is how their work will be distributed or reassigned throughout the team while their position is empty.

For best results, we recommend having more than one person be a part of this handover. Not only would it be overwhelming for someone to take on another role in addition to their own, having several people across the requirements for a role can support the transition of the responsibilities. At least one of these people should be the departing person's direct manager.

We generally follow this process:

- Host an initial meeting with the person who is leaving and the people to whom their work will be allocated.
- Make a list of tasks that are part of the person's everyday workload and allocate them to the new owners.
- Create a list of knowledge gaps around each task that the departing person can fill over their notice period, whether that's through training or by writing up guides or instructions.

Documentation

Have the departing person's direct manager then organise a second meeting to review documentation and work filing.

It's incredibly easy for a person's work to be misplaced on their desktop or hard drive, and this can cause a lot of stress for their colleagues down the track.

Create a cloud-based, accessible (but secure) place for the team to access the departing person's work and documents.

Together, you should document and file the following:

- Any important reports, blueprints, plans or other important documents that relate to current or historical projects
- Any guides or instructions for the team members' taking over the person's work
- Any account information or passwords that are relevant to the person's work
- A contact list of relevant customers, clients, suppliers that they are in contact with

Communication

Your departing team member is likely the person of contact for many customers, clients and vendors or suppliers. Especially in the case of customers and clients - it can be a bad look if their main contact at your business just disappears - so make sure that your staff member is notifying them of their departure.

We've provided an email auto-reply template later in this guide, but this shouldn't replace a personal farewell. Ask your team member to write a simple email to each contact, letting them know who at the company they should contact regarding their account or matter when your team member has finished up with the business.

Final handover meeting

To recap your handover meetings up to this point, you've had:

1. The initial handover meeting with departing team member and the person/people who will be taking on their responsibilities
2. A meeting between the departing team member and their direct manager to organise what documentation and filing needs to be completed

As the person's notice period draws to a close, we also recommend holding these final meetings:

3. The week before the person's departure, they meet again with the person/people who will be taking on their responsibilities, to do a 'confidence check'; making sure they have everything they need for the transition
4. On the person's final day, they should have a meeting with their direct manager, simply to tie up any loose ends and give a final update on work and projects

Please note these meetings **do not** constitute an Exit Interview, which is a more formal process that we'll be discussing later in this guide.

Final administration

As your employee enters their final days, it's time to wrap up some employment administration. Here's a quick overview of the tasks that you need to complete during this process.

Final payroll

When your employee finishes up with your business, they will need to be paid out any entitlements which may include annual leave as part of their last paycheck. When you use Employment Hero Payroll, you can easily view and process necessary payments, and the relevant records will be stored within the platform. If you're not using Employment Hero Payroll, complete the process manually.

Disconnect any relevant accounts

For security reasons, after your employee has finished up, make sure that for any tool or software they have access to, be that; finance, sales, social media, CRM, administration - their accounts are suspended or disabled.



Our tip

Did you know that Employment Hero has an on-platform offboarding checklist for each staff member? Never miss a step in the offboarding process, and customise your checklist with any additional offboarding tasks that are unique to your company. You can assign the checklist to the relevant employees, set due dates and keep track of what still needs to be done. It's your easiest, and most transparent, offboarding process ever.

Return of equipment

It can be difficult to get a hold of equipment after your employee has left, especially if that employee is moving for a different role. Make sure that before or as they are finishing, you can recover any company equipment, including; laptops, office furniture, keyboards, mobile phones, credit cards, uniforms and any other item that the company has given them for their role.

Set up an email auto-reply

This should be your employee's last task on their last day. Get them to set up an auto-reply to respond to any incoming communications with the new best person to contact. Unsure of exactly what to say? Check out our auto-reply template on the next page.



Our tip

An asset register makes equipment recovery simple and ensures that none of your business' property will go astray. This can be especially useful if you have a remote or hybrid workforce. Employment Hero's Asset Register feature allows you to create a list of assets owned by your organisation, specify the code, the category it falls under, the purchase amount and the name of the item owner. With filtering, viewing and uploading options; it's the easiest way to keep track of equipment around your business.

Departing employee auto-reply email template



To: work@company.com

Cc:

Subject: Automated message

Hello,

Thank you for your email.

I no longer work at [Company Name], as of [last day of employment].

If your inquiry is regarding [Department, e.g. Marketing], direct your inquiry to [Person, Role] at [email address] or [phone number].

For all general inquiries please contact [generic email address] or call [phone number].

Kind regards,

[Employee Name]

Why is offboarding so important?

Exit interviews have traditionally been quite an awkward meeting full of cringe-worthy silences, but they really don't have to be.

Many HR professionals and employers gloss over these meetings, but they're actually a golden opportunity. If you don't bother holding one with your outgoing staff member, you're missing out on a very valuable exchange.

No matter how great your internal relationships are, not many people feel comfortable giving honest feedback that could be seen as critical of their colleagues or workplace when they're trying to build a future there.

When an employee is leaving a business, however, they often enter a kind of 'nothing-to-lose' phase. As their existing responsibilities wrap up and they take a backseat in the business, they are more likely to speak candidly. Let's say they wanted to give constructive feedback about their manager's leadership style, they don't have to be concerned about their comments getting back to the person and causing an awkward situation.

During an exit interview you're likely to get the most honest, and the most helpful, feedback. This could have a really positive impact on the business.

As you ask about their personal experience, their view of their department and the wider business, and their role - you're likely to hear about potential red flags you've never considered, or be made aware of behaviour you've never been privy to. You're not going to get that kind of insight every day.

Exit interviews are also a final signal that you value the person and their feedback. We've all had those jobs where you resign and then the employer or HR manager wants to hear nothing more from you. This can make the job leaver feel more confident in their decision to go and resentful of their treatment at the business.

Through your considered approach to their resignation with an exit interview you show that you appreciate their insights and that you want to make the business a better place with their advice. It's a nice boost for the individual that could farewell them with an open mind to returning in the future.

Exit Interview Tips and Tricks:

- The interviewer is asking some quite upfront questions, so they should remember to approach the meeting with a spirit of friendliness and respect. The interviewer should listen more than they talk.
- Make sure the person conducting the interview is at least one step removed from the employee; not their direct manager or close colleague. A more senior manager or HR manager is a better choice.
- Express that although their feedback will be used for company improvement, their responses will not be shared with the wider company.
- Follow a structured set of specific questions. If you only ask generally about feedback, you'll likely get only a general response.
- Document the interviewee's responses. Using tools like [Employment Hero](#)'s meeting features can help you securely note feedback.
- Leave plenty of time for an exit interview. Doing it too close to the employees' last day when they are trying to wrap up loose ends could be stressful for them.
- At the end of the meeting, thank the employee for their time and reiterate that their feedback will be used for company improvement.



Exit Interview Template

Q1. Was there any particular reason/event that made you decide to look for a new role?

Q2. What does your new company or role offer that made you want to work there?

Q3: What are your thoughts about management and leadership within this business? Do you have any thoughts on the management style?

Q4. How do you feel about the team that you've worked within? Do you think there could be any changes to help your team work better together?

Q5. Have you enjoyed the culture here? Why or why not?

Q6. Do you feel like you have been well equipped and well supported to do your job here? What else could have been provided for a better experience?

Q7. Did you enjoy your role here? What do you think of the structure or responsibilities of the role?

Q8. Are there any red flags in the business that you think we should be aware of?

Q9. Do you have any other feedback or suggestions for what we could be doing better as a business?

Depart with care

Up until this point, we've focused on the practicalities and formalities of offboarding. Now it's time to explore the sentimental side of this experience.

Creating a special moment for your team to acknowledge the person's departure and celebrate their time with the business is really important. It's an essential part of showing that you have respect and appreciation for everyone in your team, no matter where they are in the employee lifecycle.

Here are the essential components of departing with care.

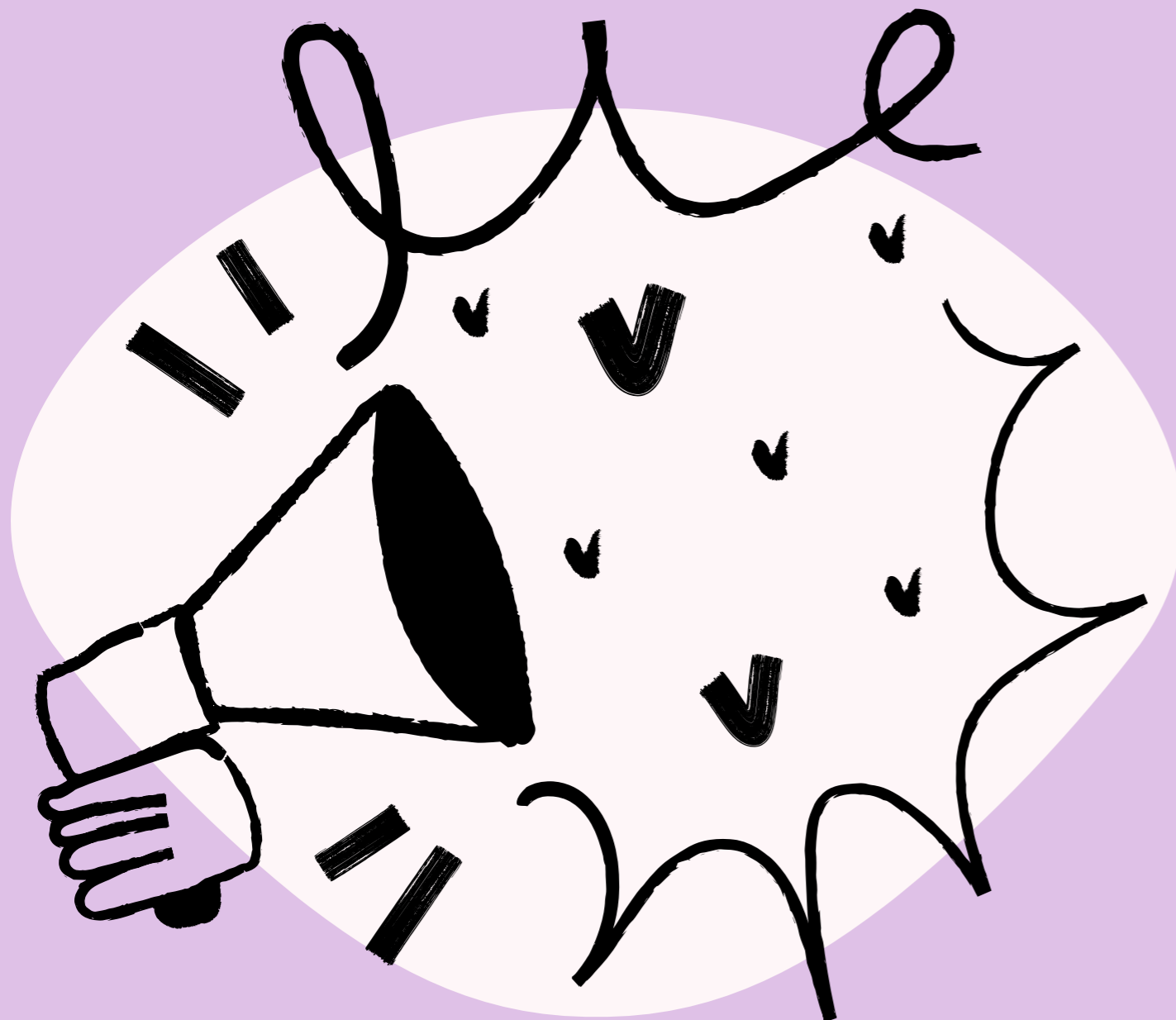
Announcement

To kick-start the process, write a considered email or message to announce the person's resignation to the team. You should announce the person's departure soon after you've informed their immediate team.

This step can often be forgotten in the rush of offboarding admin, but it's an essential one. Sending this message is almost more beneficial for the rest of the team than the person who's leaving. It encourages transparency and communication throughout the business.

In this email you should state who is leaving, the date of their departure and who will be the best person to contact for matters relating to their role. You should then highlight some achievements that the person has accomplished during their time with the company and thank them for their contribution, before sharing information about the person's farewell event.

Need some more inspiration about how you should word this email? In the next section we've provided a staff departure announcement and a template that you can easily tailor to your situation.



Common Questions

It can be confusing and sometimes upsetting for teams to find out that one of their colleagues is leaving. Be prepared to be peppered with – sometimes awkward – questions about the person’s departure.

Have some courteous and considered responses on hand, and be mindful of the departing person’s privacy. Never share personal information or information that has been conveyed in an exit interview.

Please note: These answers are only examples, answers should always be customised to your own situation.

Q: Where is [name] going?

Example answer: They’ve decided to take an opportunity at [new workplace], and we wish them all the best in their new endeavour.

Q: Why has [name] decided to leave?

Example answer: They have decided to take a new opportunity at [new workplace], we appreciate their contribution to the company and will miss having them as part of the team.

Note: If the person is leaving due to personal matters, simply state that their reason for leaving is a private matter and you can’t share any more information.

Q: When are they leaving?

Example answer: Their last day will be on [date]. We’ll be celebrating their time at the company with a farewell event on [date] at [location], check your calendar for an invitation!

Q: Who will be replacing them?

Example answer: We’re currently in the process of recruiting their replacement and hope to fill the role as soon as possible, let us know if anyone from your network could be suitable for the role! You can find the job description at [JD link].

Q: Will you be looking internally or externally to fill the role?

Example answer: We are currently recruiting externally for the role, however, we are open to internal interest. Speak with your direct manager if you’re interested in learning more about the role.

Q: Who will be taking on their workload until we find a replacement?

In the meantime, contact [staff member’s name] if you have any questions relating to [departing person’s role]. They will be able to assist you.

Our tip

This question gives the perfect opportunity to mention the details of an Employee Referral Program. Don’t have one yet? Read our [factsheet](#) to learn more about this effective recruitment strategy.

Organising a farewell

Who doesn’t want to go out with a bang? Make sure that you organise a virtual or physical farewell for your departing staff member.

Set a date before you send your departure announcement email so that you don’t have to double up on communications, and share a calendar invite with all staff. Schedule the farewell event within work hours, so that you can have as much of your team attend as possible. If your departing team member’s last day is a Friday, Friday afternoon drinks are the perfect option.

It doesn’t have to be a big flashy event, and the office (or home office) is usually the best place to host it. Keep it casual, with some drinks and snacks provided if you’re getting together physically.

At the event, don’t forget to say a few words about your departing staff member and thank them for their contribution to the business. Note some of their achievements or fond memories you have of them. Invite their direct manager or colleagues to also share any sentiments if they wish.

Cards and gifts

At their farewell party, present the person with a card (or virtual card) signed by the whole team and a gift from the company.

Our top tip for gifts? Fight the urge to give them socks, a mug, a candle or a tie.


Here are some gift ideas that we would love to receive. Bonus points if you can align the gift with the departing person's interests!

What kind of gift would you like to receive?

- A bouquet of flowers
- A book or a gift certificate to a local bookstore
- A bottle of their favourite wine; and if they're not a wine drinker - maybe a case of craft beer, local coffee beans, a boutique spirit or a selection of teas
- A hamper with local artisan foods
- Movie or theatre tickets (that they can redeem for a date of their choice)
- Zoo or aquarium tickets (that they can redeem for a date of their choice)
- A houseplant
- A gift certificate to a great local restaurant
- A gift certificate for a local experience; wine tasting, a hot air balloon trip, a theme park, an escape room; an art gallery
- A personalised notebook
- A board game or jigsaw puzzle
- A record from one of their favourite musicians (double check they have a record player before you buy this one!)
- A one-year online subscription to a learning platform like [Masterclass](#)
- A [Cameo](#) from one of their favourite celebrities (Fun Fact: Did you know you can get a Cameo from Fran Drescher?)
- A kitchen appliance; think a popcorn maker, a cocktail shaker, an espresso machine, an air fryer
- Perfume or cologne
- A passport holder or travel bag



Announcing a Departing Staff Member Email Example



To: work@company.com

Cc:

Subject: Announcement

Good afternoon team,

I'm very sad to announce that the amazing Lauren from the marketing team will be having her last day with us on Wednesday 10th November.

Lauren is pursuing an opportunity with Green Thumb Garden Centre as their Social Media Manager.


Lauren has contributed so much through her work here. During her tenure she increased our Instagram follower count by 120%, applying her creative brain to promote our product in exciting visual ways.

Lauren was also a key player in the launch of our YouTube channel. We're incredibly grateful for her dedication to this project, which benefited greatly from her social media expertise and extensive knowledge of our customer base.

Please join me in celebrating Lauren's time with us. We'll be farewelling her on Friday 26th November at 4pm with drinks and snacks in the office. You will receive a calendar invite for this shortly.

Kind regards,
Isabelle Comber
CEO

Announcing a Departing Staff Member Email Template



To: work@company.com

Cc:

Subject: Announcement

Good morning/afternoon team,

I'm very sad to announce that [name] from the [department] team will be having his/her/their last day with us on [date].

[Name] is pursuing an opportunity with [new company] as their [role].

[Name] has contributed so much through his/her/their work here. [Details of first major achievement].

[Details of second major achievement.]

Please join me in celebrating [name's] time with us. We'll be farewelling him/her/them on [date] at [time] with [event activity]. You will receive a calendar invite for this shortly.

Kind regards,
[Employer's name]
[Employer's role]

Note: If your team member is resigning for personal reasons, like taking time off for mental health or to care for a sick family member, leave this out of the email and just share their leaving date, achievements and farewell details.

Keeping in touch

Before you know it, your person will have been offboarded and farewelled from your business. The offboarding is over, and so is your relationship as an employer with them, right?

Not necessarily. We strongly recommend keeping in touch with your former employees if you are able to do so. Especially if you left things on the best possible note (due to an epic offboarding experience), you should maintain a relationship even as they pursue their next step.

An easy way to do this is to connect with them on LinkedIn if they have one. This makes it easy for you to keep up with them and their professional achievements. LinkedIn may also be able to help you identify if they are ever looking for opportunities in the future, or if they have the potential to become a customer or client.

There are also the general networking benefits of maintaining a friendly rapport with the departing staff member. Doing so makes it much easier to reach out to them to see if they know anyone that might be appropriate for a role you're recruiting for, or for possible mentorship opportunities for your remaining staff.

As there are so many positives about staying in touch, we recommend that you also go beyond LinkedIn and actually reach out to them annually, whether that's a general check-in via email or by meeting up with them for coffee and catch up.

When you're doing this with several former employees, you can create what is sometimes referred to as an Alumni Network. These people are still connected to the business and become advocates of the business without actually working there; something that can have great influence over prospective candidates and customers.

Offboarding Checklist

Handover

- Allocate responsibilities
- File work and instruction documents for simple access by remaining staff
- Have the departing employer communicate their resignation to clients, customers and suppliers
- Hold a final handover meeting on your employee's last day

Final Administration

- Final payroll admin
- Disconnect/suspend employee accounts
- Return of assets
- Set up auto-reply
- Announce employee's resignation to the team
- Organise departing employee's farewell
- Organise departing employee's card and gift
- Conduct exit interview
- Connect with the departed employee on LinkedIn
- Set a reminder to reach out to the departed employee in a year's time

Conclusion

Hopefully this guide has helped you see employee offboarding in a little bit more of a positive light. While no one likes goodbyes, by following this offboarding process you should be able to help your employee depart on the best note possible.

Resignations can be a little bit of a hit to the ego of employers. We get it, it's never nice to be told that someone is wanting to leave the business that you've invested so much in. You've also probably invested a lot in your employee that is resigning.

Remember, just because the person has decided to leave, doesn't mean that you can't maintain a productive relationship with them, or that they don't have the potential to be great spokespeople for your business.

Giving your departing employee the best possible experience, and giving them positive memories to leave with, will build these great ongoing relationships. Who knows, if they have such good associations with your business, they're all the more likely to become a boomerang employee that could come flying back your way.

We'll leave you this final offboarding tip. There's no need to play it cool as you're saying goodbye. During your final meeting, let them know that the door is always open for them to return to the team. Let them know that you'd love to see them back working for your business again one day.



Employment Hero is on a mission to make employment easier and more valuable.

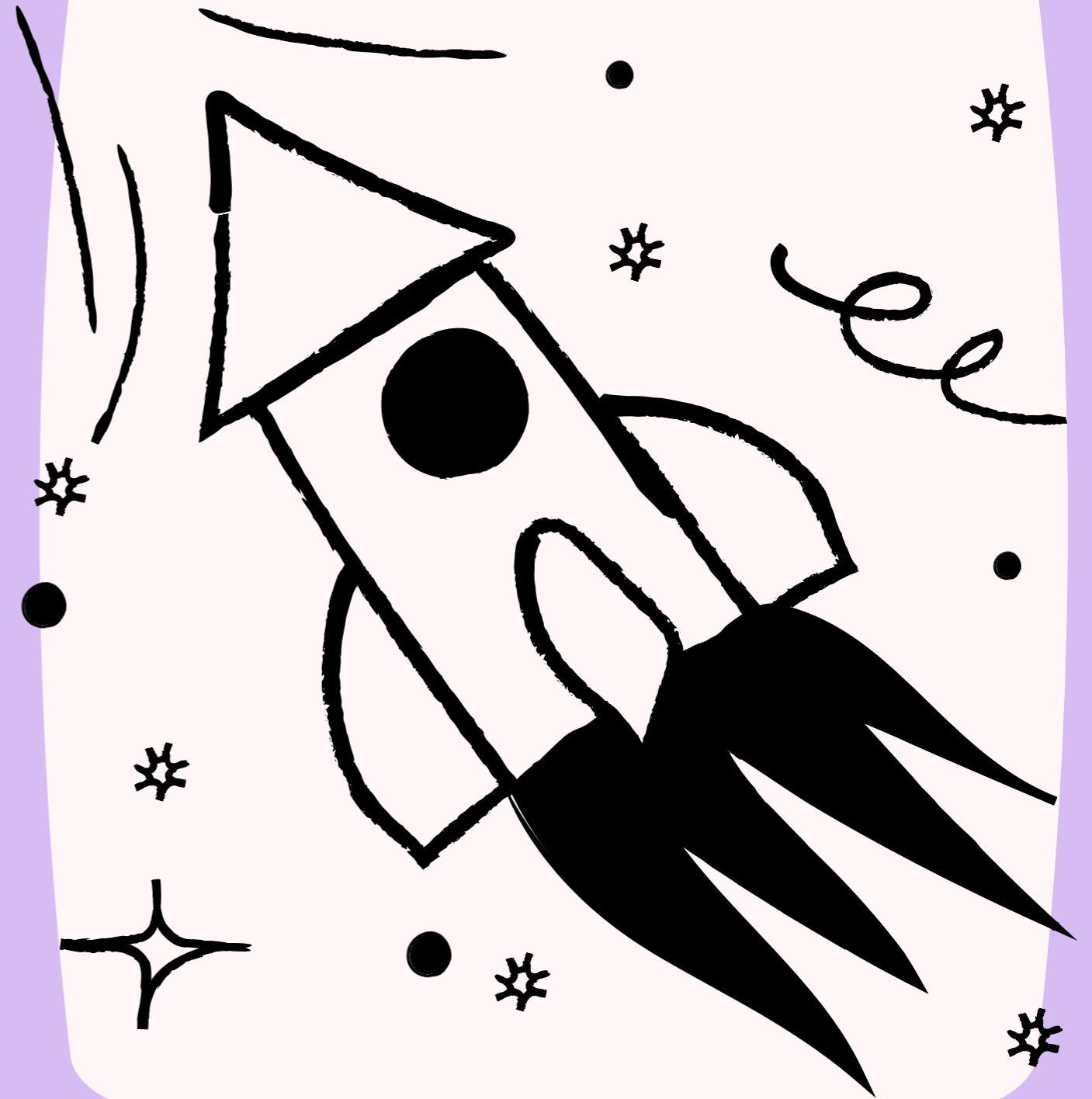
Employment Hero is the smarter way to manage people, payroll and productivity for SMEs with big ambitions. Employment Hero empowers SMEs by providing automated solutions to help launch them on the path to success by powering more productivity every day.

Employment Hero services over 6,000 businesses, collectively managing over 250,000 employees. The core platform reduces admin time by up to 80 per cent. Employment Hero is launching employers toward their goals, powering more productive teams and taking employment to rewarding new heights.

Our features include:

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