



14 HIRING AND FIRING

Hiring or firing an employee is a challenging, emotional experience and a pathway to possible lawsuits. The decision to employ or terminate someone will influence you, that individual, his or her family, your team, your customers, and your stakeholders.

THE INDUSTRIAL PHYSICIST [HTTP://WWW.AIP.ORG/TIP/INPHFA/VOL-9/ISS-3/P28.HTML](http://www.aip.org/tip/INPHFA/VOL-9/ISS-3/P28.HTML)

- 1 Look at the headline below. What do you think the article is about?
- 2 Read the article to see if you are correct. Then answer the questions.
 - a Do you think the sacking was justified?
 - b Would this be possible in your company or in your country?
 - c What advice would you give to Nicola?



Ibiza phone-in prize winner fired

Nicola Williams, a 31-year-old single mother from Newbridge in South Wales, couldn't believe her luck when she was told she was the winner of a Mediterranean holiday for herself and her six-year-old daughter.

The week's break on the sunshine island of Ibiza was the prize in a radio phone-in competition. She told reporter Hefina Rendle on BBC Wales television that she was 'totally over the moon, really excited'. However, only minutes later she was laid off. Nicola, an electronic parts worker, who phoned the radio station from work using her own mobile phone, was unaware that her boss was standing nearby. He asked her to hang up, took her into his office, and told her she was sacked. She was ordered to leave the factory immediately.

This was her first job since the birth of her daughter, and she was fired by the same manager who originally hired her.

But the story may have a happy ending. The commercial radio station which ran the competition is now trying to find her another job. A spokesman for the station said that people should be allowed to take part in competitions from work, as they are in general life. He said it was sad that the manager couldn't see the good side and just congratulate Nicola on her good luck.

Skytronics, Nicola's former employer, refused to be interviewed by the BBC, and later issued a statement supporting the action of their manager.

- 3 Find two more verbs in the article that are similar in meaning to 'sack'. Which verb is more formal?

The passive

- 4 Find sentences in the article that are similar in meaning to the following:
 - a They laid her off.
 - b They ordered her to leave the factory immediately.
- 5 Compare the two pairs of sentences in 4.
 - a Which are active and which are passive?
 - b Who is mentioned first in the active sentences?
 - c Who is mentioned first in the passive sentences?
 - d Who is the story about?
 - e What is the advantage of using the passive sentences?
 - f The agent in the active sentences is *they*. What happens to it in the passive sentences? Why?

6 Read the manager's report of the incident in 2. He uses the passive to sound more objective and formal in style. Complete the report using the verbs below in the passive.

ask give (x 2) inform (x 2) note warn

RE: NICOLA WILLIAMS

On two occasions in November Ms Nicola Williams, an employee in the assembly plant, (a) that using a mobile phone in work hours was against the company rules. Both these warnings (b) by another supervisor, and (c) in her file. Then, in December, on a further occasion, she (d) a written warning. Finally, on Friday, 12 January at 10.30 I (e) of a problem on the factory floor. When I arrived there, I found a lot of noise and shouting going on. Ms Williams was using her mobile phone to participate in a radio phone-in programme. Apparently she had won a prize. I asked her to put the phone down immediately, and to come in to my office. I decided to terminate her employment, and in the presence of Ms Jones, my deputy, Ms Williams was told that she was being sacked. She became hysterical and abusive, and (f) to leave the factory immediately. She (g) that her possessions would be forwarded to her by post.

7 In what way are the details about the incident different?

8 Improve these short texts by changing one verb to the passive in each text.

- They have laid off over 35,000 people in the last five years, unemployment is rising, and there are social problems in the region.
35,000 people have been laid off in the last five years, unemployment is rising, and there are social problems in the region.
- The business is a great success. They are hiring new staff and it is expanding fast.
- As there was a recession and the number of orders decreased, they closed one of the factories.
- To improve margins, it is making the new model in Hungary where labour costs are lower.
- Ford has several plants in Europe. One of them is in Valencia and it produces the Escort there.
- They have announced plans for the new industrial estate. It will cover ten hectares and create space for over fifteen business ventures.

Discussion

9 Work in groups. In what situations do you think sacking is justified? Think about the following:

dishonesty disrespect to superiors
inappropriate dress
industrial action (going on strike)
not meeting objectives or achieving results
punctuality revealing company secrets
violence

Add your own ideas, if you like.

