Key steps to review when an employee departs

When someone leaves your business, the instinct is to think about IT passwords, building keys, and maybe a final paycheck. But physical access is just as critical, and it is often the area where gaps linger the longest. A single unreturned key or an unchanged code can put your premises, your inventory, and your other employees at risk. The moment an employee walks out the door, a short but deliberate review of your commercial locks can prevent a small oversight from becoming a costly problem.

Collect and account for every key

The first and most obvious step is to gather all keys that the departing employee held. But collecting them is not enough. You need to verify that every key returned matches the key you issued. It is surprisingly common for a duplicate to have been cut without anyone knowing, or for a key to have been lent to a colleague and never logged. Compare the returned keys against your issuance records, and if you do not keep a log, start one now. Even if the employee hands back the correct key, you cannot be certain that no copies exist. That is why the next steps matter even more.

Change the locks on shared entry points

If the employee had access to a master key or a key that opened common areas such as the main entrance, a staff door, or a shared hallway, those cylinders should be rekeyed or replaced as soon as possible. Master-key systems are convenient but they concentrate risk. One key can open many doors, and once that key is out of your control, the entire system is compromised. A commercial locksmith service can rekey a cylinder so that existing keys no longer work, without replacing the whole lock. This is faster and cheaper than full replacement, and it keeps your key hierarchy intact for other employees.

Review and update your key hierarchy

Departures are a good moment to look at how your master-key system is structured. If the employee had a key that opened every office, every storage closet, and the server room, you may want to adjust the hierarchy so that future staff get only the access they actually need. A well-designed key hierarchy limits the damage when a key is lost or not returned. It also makes rekeying simpler because only certain levels of the system are affected. Talk to a commercial locksmith about whether your current system still matches your staffing setup, and whether it can be tightened without disrupting daily operations.

Check electronic and keypad access

If your business uses keypad locks, card readers, or biometric systems, the departing employee's credentials must be deactivated immediately. Do not rely on a single master code that everyone shares. Every user should have a unique code or card so that you can revoke just that one entry point. Also check whether the employee had access to the system's administrative settings. If they did, change the admin password right away. Electronic systems are powerful but they are only as secure as the people who hold the credentials. Treat them the same way you treat physical keys: revoke, reset, and verify.

One practical step that is often missed is to walk through the building with a list of the employee's access points. Test each door they used to confirm that their code or card no longer works. This walk-through also reveals any door that was propped open or had a faulty latch, issues that can become security gaps when someone is no longer around to notice them.

Inspect panic bars and storefront door hardware

In commercial settings, panic bars and storefront doors are common entry points that can develop wear over time. An employee who left may have been the one who always had trouble with a sticky panic bar or a misaligned door closer. After they depart, have a locksmith inspect these fixtures. A panic bar that does not release properly can trap people in an emergency, and a storefront door that does not latch fully is an invitation for anyone to walk in. A commercial locksmith service can adjust or replace the hardware so that your building remains both secure and compliant with local fire codes.

Security after a departure is not just about locking the door; it is about making sure the door locks correctly every time. A worn cylinder or a loose strike plate can make it easy for someone with a copied key to slip in unnoticed. Replacing or upgrading the commercial cylinder on high-traffic doors is a straightforward fix that pays off in peace of mind.



Consider the timing of tenant turnover

If your business operates in a leased space, an employee departure may coincide with a broader tenant turnover. When one tenant moves out and another moves in, the landlord or property manager should rekey all shared doors and any locks that the previous tenant's staff could have copied. Even if your lease says the landlord handles that, it is worth confirming in writing. A departing employee who had access to a common hallway or a shared storage area could still have a key that works for the next tenant as well. This is one of those situations where a small coordination step now saves a much larger problem later.

Document the changes and set a schedule

After you have rekeyed, deactivated credentials, and inspected the hardware, write down what was changed and when. Keep a log of which cylinders were rekeyed, which codes were removed, and which keys were collected. This record helps you track patterns over time. If you find that you are rekeying the same door every time someone leaves, maybe that door should have a different lock type or a different access control system. It also helps you hold employees accountable. When the next departure happens, you already have a process to follow.

A regular schedule for reviewing physical access, perhaps every six months or after any significant staff change, keeps your security from drifting. It is easy to let things slide when you are busy, but a few minutes of review can prevent a situation where a former employee, or someone who found their key, walks into your building after hours. The goal is not to be paranoid; it is to be methodical. A business that treats every departure as a security event builds a culture of awareness that protects everyone.

Putting it all together

When an employee leaves, you are not just losing a team member; you are closing a chapter of access. The steps above are simple, but they rely on follow-through. Collect keys, change locks on shared points, update your key hierarchy, deactivate electronic credentials, inspect panic bars and storefront door hardware, and document everything. Taking these actions consistently means you maintain secure access after staff changes without disrupting your daily operations. It is one of those small investments in process that keeps your business running smoothly and safely, day in and day out.

If you are unsure about any part of the process, a commercial locksmith service can assess your current setup and recommend changes that fit your building and your budget. They can also help you design a key system that is easier to manage in the future. The key is to act quickly, think ahead, and treat every departure as an opportunity to improve, not just a task to check off a list.

By staying on top of these changes, you protect your property, your people, and your peace of mind. And that is a return that far outweighs the effort of a few minutes of planning and a phone call to a professional. When you maintain secure access after staff changes, you keep your business exactly where it belongs: under your control.