



An Extended Guide · No. 1861

Keypads, Fobs or Phones? Door Access for a Small Office

Choosing an access method — and
shutting people out fast when they leave

Tech Made Simple — Service Made Personal

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! Read this first — it's about people, not just pictures

Before the gear, a word that matters more than any camera: with a business you are recording other people — customers, staff, people walking by — so where you point a camera, and whether it picks up sound, is as important as the picture. As a rule, keep cameras on general work and public areas, never on restrooms, changing areas, or anywhere someone expects privacy, and be very careful about recording audio. This guide gives you plain-English general information, not legal advice. For your own situation — especially anything to do with employees, audio, or the law — check with an attorney who knows Ohio. Door access is a cousin of your cameras: it decides who can get in, and — just as important — it lets you shut someone out the moment they're no longer welcome.

Keypads, fobs, or phones — picking the right one

Controlling who can open your doors is one of the most useful upgrades a small office can make. No more handing out keys you can't get back, no more changing the lock every time someone leaves. But there are three common ways to do it, and the right one depends on how your place runs. This guide walks you through the choice in plain language.

I'm Bill, and I run Bill's Home Tech here in Portage County, Ohio. For 30-plus years I've helped folks get comfortable with their technology, patiently and in plain language. Door access trips people up because the cheapest option looks fine until the day someone leaves on bad terms — and then you learn the difference the hard way. Let's get it right the first time.

We'll cover the three ways to unlock a door, what each costs in rough terms, and the one thing that matters more than any of it: being able to remove someone's access fast. We'll also talk about the parts that need a licensed pro, and the fire-safety rule you can never bend.

★ Not sure which fits your office?

The right answer depends on how many doors you have, how often staff come and go, and how techy your team is. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042 and we'll sort it out together — free, with nothing to sell you.

The whole guide, on one page

If you remember only these things, you'll pick the right door-access setup for your office.

- ❑ There are three common ways to unlock a business door: a keypad code, a fob or card, or your phone.
- ❑ A keypad code is cheapest and needs no device to carry — but the code is shared, so it's weak when staff leave and can be shoulder-surfed.
- ❑ Fobs and cards give each person their own credential, so you can revoke one person without disturbing anyone else — and see who came in.
- ❑ Phone credentials live in an app, can be revoked remotely, and are convenient — but they depend on phones and an account.
- ❑ The thing that matters most: when someone leaves, you must be able to REMOVE their access fast. Per-person fobs or phones make that easy; a shared code does not.
- ❑ Electric locks need power and usually a licensed pro for the hardware and wiring — and fire-exit doors must always let people OUT.

✓ One rule to hold onto

Pick the method you'll actually keep up to date. The best system is the one where, the day someone leaves, pulling their access is a two-minute job you won't put off — because the access you forget to remove is the real risk.

The three ways to unlock a door

Nearly every access system for a small office comes down to one of three credentials — something you know, something you carry, or something on your phone.

Keypad / PIN code

Staff type a code on a keypad to unlock the door. Nothing to carry, nothing to lose, and it's the cheapest to put in. The catch is that the code is shared among everyone.

Fobs / cards

Each person carries a small fob or card they tap to unlock. Everyone has their own, so you can see who came in and shut off one person without touching anyone else.

Phone / mobile credentials

The unlock lives in an app on each person's phone. It's convenient, it can be handed out and revoked remotely, and there's no card to buy — but it leans on everyone's phone and an account to run it.

★ Three good options, one right fit

None of these is wrong — they just fit different offices. Tell me how your place runs and I'll help you see which one suits you, and whether a mix makes sense. Call (330) 200-8042.

The keypad code: cheap and simple, with a catch

A keypad is the easiest place to start, and for some offices it's plenty. But its weakness is real, and worth understanding before you commit.

There's a lot to like. It's the lower-cost option, there's no device for anyone to carry or lose, and anyone can use it the moment you tell them the code. For a small, steady team that rarely changes, that simplicity is genuinely appealing.

The catch is that the code is shared. Everyone uses the same one, which means two things. First, when someone leaves, the only way to cut their access is to change the code — for everyone — and tell the whole team the new one. Second, a shared code is easy to shoulder-surf: someone watches a staff member punch it in, or it gets passed around, and now people you never approved can walk in.

- **Upside:** lowest cost, nothing to carry, dead simple to use.
- **Downside:** one shared code — change it for everyone when one person leaves.
- **Downside:** easy to shoulder-surf or quietly pass around.
- **Downside:** you can't tell who came in — the code doesn't know who typed it.

! The shared code is only as fresh as your last change

A keypad is fine until the day you need to shut one person out — then you realize everyone shares the code and you have to reset it for the whole team. If staff come and go, that chore gets old fast, and skipping it leaves the old code live.

Fobs and cards: one per person, easy to revoke

Give each person their own fob or card and you fix the keypad's big weakness — you can shut off one person without disturbing anyone else.

Because every fob is tied to one person, the whole picture changes. When someone leaves, you revoke their fob and only theirs — nobody else's access changes, and there's no new code for the rest of the team to learn. And since each tap is logged, you can see who came in and when, which settles a lot of questions on its own.

This usually costs more than a bare keypad — there's a bit more equipment, and you buy fobs or cards — but for most offices with any staff turnover, the control and the record are well worth it. The main nuisance is the human one: people lose fobs, lend them, or forget them at home.

- **Upside:** revoke one person instantly, without touching anyone else.
- **Upside:** a record of who came in and when.
- **Middle cost:** more than a keypad, and you buy the fobs or cards.
- **Nuisance:** fobs get lost, lent, or left at home.

✓ Losing a fob is a small problem, by design

When a fob goes missing, you just revoke that one and issue another — the rest of the office never notices. Compare that to a lost key or a leaked shared code, and you can see why per-person credentials are the grown-up answer.

Phone credentials: convenient and remote

The newest common option puts the unlock in an app on each person's phone. For the right office, it's the slickest of the three.

Like a fob, a phone credential belongs to one person, so you get the same per-person control and record. What's different is the convenience: there's no card to buy or hand over, and you can grant or revoke access remotely — give a new hire access before their first day, or cut someone off from your couch the minute they leave, without meeting anyone at the door.

The trade-off is that it leans on things a keypad doesn't: everyone needs a capable phone with the app installed and charged, and the whole thing runs on an account and usually an internet connection. For a tech-comfortable team that fits; for a crew that doesn't all carry smartphones, a fob may be the kinder choice.

- **Upside:** grant and revoke access remotely, in seconds.
- **Upside:** per-person, with a record, and no cards to buy.
- **Depends on:** everyone having a charged phone with the app.
- **Depends on:** an account and usually an internet connection.

★ Great for some teams, awkward for others

Phone unlock is wonderful if everyone's comfortable with apps, and a headache if they're not. Tell me about your team at (330) 200-8042 and I'll tell you honestly whether it'll feel like magic or like a fight.

Two kinds of businesses, two sets of needs

The single biggest factor in choosing a door-access method is how often your people change. A settled team and a high-turnover crew want different things.

If you have a small, steady team

Few people, who rarely change, all of whom you trust. Your main goal is simple, reliable entry without fussing over credentials. Turnover is rare enough that resetting things isn't a constant chore.

- A keypad code can be plenty — simple, cheap, nothing to carry.
- If you'd still like a record of who came in, fobs are a modest step up.
- Change the code on a schedule anyway, and whenever anyone leaves.
- Keep it simple — don't buy more system than your office needs.

If staff come and go often

New hires, seasonal help, contractors, and departures are a regular part of life. Your main goal is shutting off a person's access the moment they leave, fast and without disrupting everyone else.

- Go per-person — fobs or phone credentials, not a shared code.
- Revoke a leaver's access the same day, by itself, in minutes.
- Lean on the who-came-in record for accountability.
- Phone credentials shine here if the team is comfortable with apps.

★ Somewhere in between?

Lots of offices are — a steady core plus the odd contractor. Tell me how your people come and go and I'll help you match the method to your real life, not a sales pitch. Call (330) 200-8042.

The one thing that matters most

If you take away a single idea from this guide, make it this: the moment someone leaves, you must be able to remove their access fast. Everything else is secondary.

Think about the day an employee quits, is let go, or a contractor finishes up. From that moment, they should not be able to walk back into your office. Whether that's easy or a headache depends entirely on the method you chose — and it's the choice people regret most when they get it wrong.

With per-person fobs or phone credentials, it's a two-minute job: you revoke that one person, and nobody else is affected. With a shared keypad code, there's no way to remove just them — you must change the code for everyone and get the new one to the whole team, every single time. Guess which chore gets skipped when you're busy?

- **Fob or phone:** revoke one person, same day, nobody else disturbed.
- **Shared keypad code:** change it for the whole team, every time.
- The access you forget to remove is the access that comes back to bite you.

! The forgotten credential is the real danger

Break-ins and inside trouble often trace back to access that was never revoked — an old code still live, a fob never collected. A system where cutting one person off is quick and painless is a system you'll actually keep current. That's the whole game.

What each one costs, in rough terms

I won't quote dollar figures — prices move and every door is different — but I can tell you how the three stack up against each other.

A keypad is the lower-cost way in: one keypad at the door, not much else. Fobs and cards sit in the middle — a bit more equipment at the door, plus the ongoing small cost of the fobs or cards themselves as you issue them. Phone credentials vary, but they skip the cost of cards and often lean on an account or service that may carry an ongoing fee.

The bigger cost on any of them is usually the door hardware and the labor to fit it — the electric lock, the wiring, and the professional to install it. That part is roughly the same whichever credential you pick, so choose the method by how your office runs, not by shaving a little off the credential. We cover choosing an installer in its own guide.

Method	Rough cost
Keypad / PIN	Lower
Fobs / cards	Middle, plus fobs
Phone / mobile	Varies, no cards

✓ **Don't let a few dollars pick your system**

The gap between these in credential cost is small next to what the right fit saves you in hassle. Pick for how your team works — the cheapest option you have to fight every week isn't the cheapest at all.

Knowing who came and went

Beyond keeping people out, a good access system tells you who came in and when — a quiet benefit that settles more disputes than you'd think.

Because fobs and phone credentials belong to one person each, the system can log every entry: who unlocked which door, at what time. When something goes missing, when you need to know who opened up, when there's a question about hours — the record answers it without anyone's word against another's.

A shared keypad code can't do this. The code doesn't know who typed it, so a log of 'the code was used at 7:02' tells you nothing about who it was. If knowing who came in matters to you — and for most businesses it eventually does — that alone is a reason to go per-person.

✓ The record pairs beautifully with your cameras

An entry log plus a camera at the door is a powerful combination: the log says who and when, the camera confirms it. Plan them together and each makes the other more useful. Our planning guide covers tying it all in.

The lock itself: power and a pro

Whichever credential you pick, something has to physically unlock the door — and that part is where a licensed professional usually comes in.

A keypad or fob reader is only the button; the muscle is an electric lock or strike that actually releases the door. That hardware needs power, and it needs wiring run to it and fitted correctly to the door. Getting it right — so it holds securely, releases reliably, and doesn't chew up the door — is a job for a licensed pro, not a weekend project.

Because the lock runs on power, you also have to think about what happens when the power goes out. A pro will set up the right behavior for each door so a blackout doesn't either trap people inside or leave the place wide open. That safe behavior isn't guesswork — it follows the codes, which is exactly why you want a professional on it.

★ I do the brains; a pro does the door

I'm a tech helper, not a licensed contractor. I'm glad to help you choose the system, set up the app, manage the fobs, and get it all working together — and for the electric lock and wiring I'll help you line up a trustworthy local pro. Call (330) 200-8042.

The rule you can never bend: people must get OUT

This is the most important page here. A locked door is about keeping people out — but a fire-exit door must always let people out, no matter what.

Access control decides who can come IN. It must never stop anyone from getting OUT in an emergency. On a fire-exit door, people have to be able to leave freely and instantly — no code, no fob, no fumbling — even if the power is out, the system is down, or the door is 'locked' to the outside world. A door that could trap someone inside during a fire is a danger, not a security feature.

The specifics — which doors count, exactly how they must behave, what hardware is required — are set by life-safety and fire codes, and they're not something to eyeball. This is precisely the kind of thing a licensed professional handles as part of the job, following the code for your building.

! Never trade a safe exit for security

If you remember one thing from this whole guide, make it this: no access-control setup is worth a door someone can't get out of in a fire. Always leave this to a licensed pro who follows the fire code — it is life-safety, and there's no bending it.

You don't have to pick just one

Many offices land on a sensible mix — different methods for different doors, or two at once on the door that matters most.

There's no rule that says every door must use the same credential. You might put fobs on the main entrance where you want a record, and a simple keypad on an interior storeroom. Or you might run phone credentials for the staff who have the app and keep a few fobs for those who don't.

On a high-security door you can even require two things at once — a fob and a code, say — so a lost fob alone won't open it. Start with the method that fits your office overall, then adjust door by door where it makes sense. A good installer will help you map this out.

✓ Match the method to the door's job

The front door, the server closet, and the supply room don't need the same level of control. Spend your care on the doors that matter and keep the rest simple — a mix is often the smartest, not the laziest, answer.

A simple routine for when someone leaves

The whole value of good access control shows up on one day — someone's last. Have a routine so it never gets skipped.

The moment a person is no longer welcome — they quit, you let them go, a contract ends — their access should end too, that same day. With per-person fobs or phones it's quick, so make it a fixed step in your off-boarding, right alongside collecting the laptop and the keys.

- ❑ Revoke the person's fob or phone credential the same day.
- ❑ Collect any physical fob or card they were issued.
- ❑ If you use a shared keypad code, change it and tell the remaining team.
- ❑ Check the entry log to confirm their access is actually closed.
- ❑ Note it done, so nobody assumes someone else handled it.

! Don't leave it for 'later'

The riskiest gap is the few days between someone leaving and someone remembering to cut their access. Make it same-day and specific, assigned to one person, so it never falls through the cracks.

Common mistakes people make

A handful of avoidable slip-ups account for most door-access regret. Now you'll know them in advance.

- **A shared keypad code that never changes**, so every ex-employee still knows the way in.
- **Forgetting to revoke a leaver's access**, the single most common security gap.
- **Picking by price alone**, then fighting a system that doesn't fit how you work.
- **Going phone-only with a team that isn't all on smartphones**, and living with the daily friction.
- **Treating the electric lock as a DIY job**, when it needs a pro and power planning.
- **Rigging a fire-exit door so it can trap people** — never, ever.

★ Head these off before you buy

Every one of these is cheaper to avoid than to fix. Talk it through with me first and we'll pick a system that fits and set up the leaver routine from day one. Call (330) 200-8042.

Questions to ask before you buy

Whether you're talking to an installer, a vendor, or to me, these questions get you to the right system.

Q: When someone leaves, how fast can I cut off just them?

The best answer is 'in minutes, without touching anyone else' — which means per-person fobs or phones. If the answer is 'change the code for everybody', weigh whether that chore fits your turnover.

Q: Can I see who came in and when?

With fobs or phone credentials, yes — each entry is logged to a person. A shared keypad code can't tell you who typed it. Decide whether that record matters to you; for most businesses it eventually does.

Q: Who handles the electric lock and the wiring?

That should be a licensed professional. The reader is the easy part; the lock, the power, and fitting it to the door safely are a pro's job. Our installer guide helps you choose one.

Q: What happens to my fire-exit doors in a power cut?

People must always be able to get OUT — instantly, with no credential, even with the power off. This follows the fire code, so make sure a pro is setting it up to that standard, not improvising.

✓ If the fire-exit answer is vague, stop

A professional should answer the fire-exit question clearly and confidently, because it's life-safety and governed by code. Vagueness there is a reason to find a different installer, not to proceed.

If a keypad is your choice, use it well

A keypad can serve a small, steady office just fine — if you respect its one weakness and manage the code with a little discipline.

The whole risk of a keypad is the shared code going stale or leaking. So treat the code as something that expires. Change it on a regular schedule — not just when forced to — and always the moment anyone leaves or you suspect it's been passed around or seen.

- Change the code on a set schedule, and immediately when someone leaves.
- Don't post it, text it around, or tape it near the door.
- Shield the keypad so a code can't be shoulder-surfed from the lot.
- If staff turnover picks up, treat that as your cue to move to fobs.

✓ A keypad is a fine starting point, not a forever answer

Plenty of offices begin with a keypad and move to fobs once they grow or staff start coming and going. There's no shame in starting simple — just watch for the day the shared code becomes more trouble than it's worth.

When a fob goes missing or a phone is lost

Per-person credentials turn a scary problem — a lost key — into a small, routine one. Here's how to handle it calmly.

If someone loses a fob, you don't have to re-key the building or reset a code for everyone. You revoke that one fob so it won't open anything, and issue a replacement. The rest of the office carries on without noticing. A lost phone is the same story — revoke that person's credential and set them up again on their new phone.

This is the quiet superpower of per-person access: a lost credential is contained to one person, never a crisis for the whole office. Make reporting a lost fob or phone a no-blame, same-day habit so it's dealt with before anyone could misuse it.

✓ Encourage people to report a lost fob right away

The sooner a lost fob or phone is reported, the sooner you revoke it — so make it easy and blame-free to tell you. A fob revoked an hour after it's lost is a non-event; one nobody mentions for a week is a risk.

What happens when the power or internet drops

Electric locks run on power, and some systems lean on the internet. A little planning keeps an outage from locking you out — or wide open.

Because the lock needs power, a blackout is a moment your installer should plan for in advance — both for safety (people must get out) and for security (the place shouldn't fall open or lock everyone out by accident). A small backup power source for the access gear keeps a short outage from becoming a lockout. This is part of what a pro sets up to code.

If you choose phone credentials, ask what happens when the internet is down — a good system still lets approved people in during an outage rather than failing shut. Know the answer before you rely on it, so a dropped connection on a Monday morning isn't a crisis at the front door.

! Plan the outage before it happens

The worst time to discover how your locks behave in a blackout is during one. Have your installer walk you through exactly what each door does when the power or internet drops — and confirm the fire-exit doors still let people out, always.

Getting started without overbuying

You don't have to wire every door at once. Start where access control does the most good and grow from there.

Begin with the main entrance — the door everyone uses and the one you most want to control and log. Pick the credential that fits your team, get a pro to fit the lock to code, and set up your leaver routine from the first day. That one door teaches you how the whole system feels.

From there, add interior or secondary doors as you need them, and mix methods where it makes sense. Because you started with the right foundation — a reputable system, a pro on the hardware, a clear routine — each new door is a small addition, not a fresh project.

★ Let's start with the one door that matters most

Tell me about your office and I'll help you pick the method, line up a pro for the lock, and get the main door done right — then we grow it at your pace. Call (330) 200-8042.

Common Questions

The questions I hear most from owners choosing door access for a small office, answered plainly.

Q: Keypad, fob, or phone — which should I choose?

It comes down to turnover. A small, steady team can do fine with a keypad; an office where staff come and go wants per-person fobs or phone credentials so you can cut off one person fast without disturbing anyone else.

Q: Why is a shared keypad code risky?

Because everyone uses the same one. When someone leaves you must change it for the whole team, and it's easy to shoulder-surf or pass around. The code you forget to change is the way an ex-employee walks back in.

Q: Can I really cut off one person in minutes?

With fobs or phone credentials, yes — you revoke that one person and nobody else is affected. That ability is the single most important reason to go per-person rather than a shared code.

Q: Do I need an electrician or contractor?

For the electric lock and its wiring, yes — that's a licensed pro's job, including planning what happens in a power cut. I can handle the system, the app, and the fobs and help you line up the pro for the door. See our installer guide.

Q: What about my fire-exit doors?

People must always be able to get OUT, instantly, even with the power off — that's life-safety, set by the fire code. Leave it to a licensed professional. This is general information, not legal or code advice.

★ Still weighing it up?

Door access is one of those things that's simple once someone lays out the three options honestly. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042 and we'll pick the one that fits your office, with nothing to sell you.

You don't have to do this alone

You just have to remember that a friendly, patient person is one call away.

I hope this guide made door access for your office feel a little less daunting and a lot more doable. Keep it with your other business papers, come back to a page whenever you need it, and don't worry about memorizing anything — that's what the guide is for.

When you'd rather have a hand, that's exactly what I do. I come to your place of business, work at your pace, and never make you feel rushed or silly for asking. A first visit is a flat \$99, and for the parts that don't need me on-site I can often help right on your screen for \$49. Every visit comes with a 30-day, come-back-free guarantee. I'm a tech helper, not a licensed electrician or low-voltage contractor — for in-wall wiring or panel work I'll help you line up a trustworthy local pro and make sure it all works together.

★ Bill's Home Tech — real help, close to home

Call or text me at (330) 200-8042, or visit BillsHomeTech.com. Serving Atwater and all of Portage County. 30+ years of patient, plain-English tech help — and if you're ever not 100% happy with a visit, I'll make it right or refund it. That's a promise. — Bill

The Three Ways In

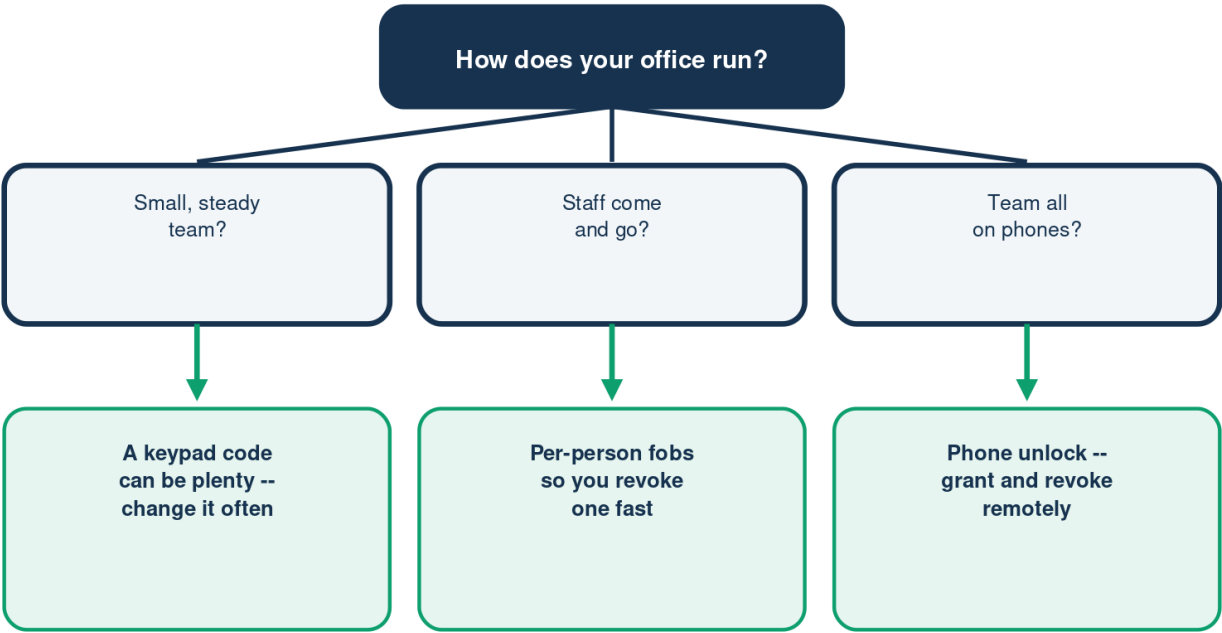
Each fits a different kind of office

	Revoke one?	Who came in?
Keypad / PIN	No -- shared	Can't tell
Fobs / cards	Yes -- just them	Yes, logged
Phone / mobile	Yes -- remotely	Yes, logged

Per-person credentials let you shut one person out fast.

Which Should I Pick?

Let your team and turnover point the way

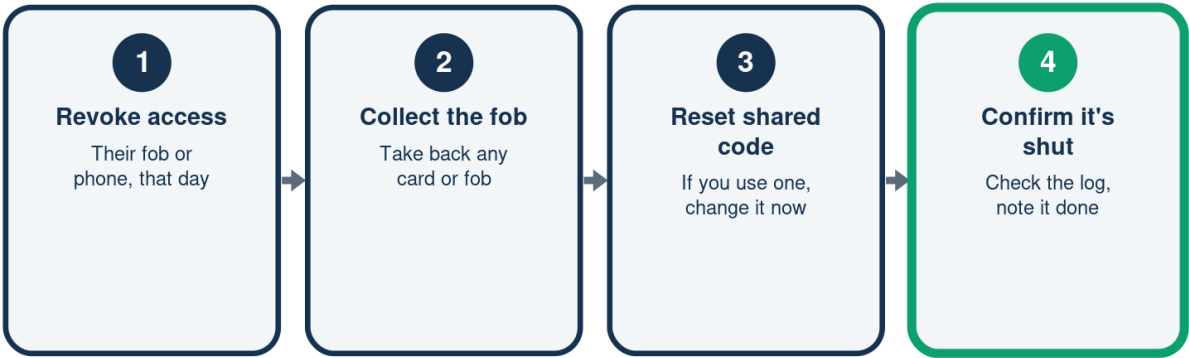


Any electric lock needs a pro -- and fire exits must always open.

Illustration - a schematic, not to scale. Your setup may differ.

When Someone Leaves

Same-day, so it never gets skipped



The access you forget to remove is the one that bites you.

Cost and Fit, in Plain Terms

Pick for how you work, not a few dollars

	Rough cost	Best for
Keypad / PIN	Lower	Steady team
Fobs / cards	Middle	Turnover
Phone / mobile	Varies	App-ready team

The lock and wiring cost about the same whichever you pick.



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A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill.

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