

RETAIL PLACEMENT ASSOCIATES



Have You Ever Been Terminated? Join the Club.

It's a kick-in-the-gut, suck-the-air-from-the-room, I'm-hearing-voices-and-they-are-echoing-in-my-head kind of experience. **You've been fired!**

Even if you knew it was coming, even if you prepared for the possibility, that life-changing moment can leave you motionless—unable to call friends, unable to believe there is another chance out there for you. You think you'll be marked for eternity.

HERE'S SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT: MANY PEOPLE HAVE BEEN FIRED. The boss who fired you was once probably fired. The person who may interview you was probably let go at some point. It's devastating, it's traumatic, but it's fixable.

The day Richard was fired as a recruiter for the transportation company he worked for was the start of a new life. Unfortunately, he did not realize it as he looked at pictures of his family and wondered how he could tell his wife and children he no longer was employed. He said the firing was absolutely "traumatic."

"You start to doubt yourself," he said. He took time off to get back together. It would have been impossible at the time, he said, to immediately get out and interview and "garner enthusiasm."

He found solace in the fact that he had networked and had volunteered with organizations that were filled with people who helped him get back to work. He started consulting and won clients who hired him to do their hiring and recruiting. Today, he's a children's program manager with a mental health association. In his spare time, he talks to people about trying to find a job after they've been fired.

EVEN IF EMPLOYEES SENSE THEY AREN'T LONG FOR THIS OFFICE WORLD, IT'S NOT SIMPLE. "I could see the train pulling into the station," said an international development consultant, who years ago pre-empted her boss shortly before she thought she would be terminated. "I said, 'Look, this is clear it's not a good fit. Here's what I propose.'" She asked to stay for another month to give herself time to find a new job and tie up loose ends—while earning a paycheck.

She always keeps in touch with the people in her field of international development. They help her, and she finds that she is thrilled to help them. "I'm constantly helping friends with crafting resumes. I constantly have friends passing on openings to me, and then I pass them on to other people. It's just like good karma. It comes back."

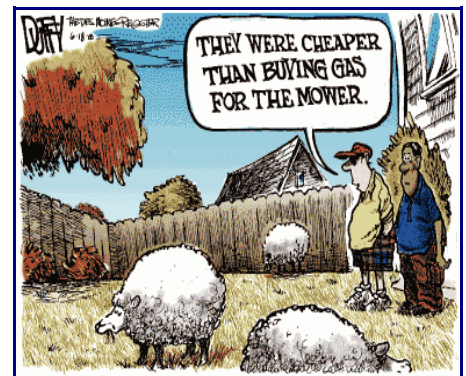
NOT TO PUT A SHINING LIGHT ON BEING FIRED. AT THE TIME, IT'S A REAL CONFIDENCE DEFLATOR. "I never look at it as a positive experience," said Scott. He was fired ten years ago. "The whole thing was so ugly. They didn't like me. I didn't like them. And it was an ego blow."

But getting fired also got him out of a job he hated as a salesman in the hospitality industry. The problem is that once he was let go, he couldn't figure out what to do next. After dawdling, a friend told him about job listings at her temporary placement firm. He took a temporary job at a company that hired him full-time five months later and, shortly thereafter, started promoting him. He is still with the company today.

Getting fired helped Scott with another useful thing. On days when he might feel like goofing off, he remembers what it's like to be fired. "It keeps me motivated because you know it can happen," he said.

MARY KNOWS HOW MUCH A FIRING CAN HURT SOMEONE'S SELF-ESTEEM. After she was fired, she immediately started to work. She was a poll worker during elections and took a temp job just after termination. The jobs kept her busy, kept money flowing in and reminded her that she is a smart, capable woman. When she was hired full-time, it took her a full year to feel professionally secure again. But through it all, she learned what sort of position she really

Just For Laughs



DATES TO REMEMBER

April

- 1—April's Fools' Day
- 2- Daylight Savings Time Begins
- 9—Palm Sunday
- 12—Passover Begins at Sundown
- 16—Easter Sunday



May

- 14—Mother's Day
- 29—Memorial Day



June

- 18—Father's Day
- 21—First Day of Summer



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wanted. "I realized I had been getting into positions doing more things I wasn't interested in." She is now a director of accounting for a D.C. association. And incredibly happy.

THERE IS THE PUT-ME-OUT-OF-MY-MISERY FIRING, TOO. When one advertising executive was told by her boss that it wasn't working out, the natural shock was closely followed by relief. She had been told there were issues to work on. She worked on them. "I thought it was unfixable but I wanted to do what it took," she said. "It was sort of relief, because I had been questioning my abilities.

I had gone from a place where I had been tremendously successful to a place where it wasn't a great fit. My mentality was, 'I'm going to make this work, because, of course, I don't fail.'" She realized quickly that it was good that someone killed the relationship for her.

Leaving was hard. She couldn't get excited about finding a job at another firm. She felt she was in such a specific field within advertising that there would not be many options for her anyway. Yes, the transition was rough: She had never *not* worked. She had to buy her own computer to start her job search. She didn't know how to start a day without going to the office.

Then she was hired to do some free-lance work that "put me in touch with being good at it again." The experience reinforced that she really had just been at the wrong job. Soon, another friend introduced her to the president of an advertising firm. They hit it off and she moved from Boston to New York to take the job she has today. "As I started to talk to people about my experience, it's like everyone's been fired," she said. "There really is life after it."

Contents Courtesy of Amy Joice, The Washington Post.

Interviewing Stories—What we can learn from strange behavior

The candidate interview is a unique experience — that strange interaction between two strangers sitting across from another, one asking the other about their life and accomplishments, with an eye towards assessing if they are a fit for a particular role.

One of the great things about human nature is our unpredictability. You don't know what's going to come out of the other person's mouth or how the experience will end up. How many of us have gone in with high expectations of an individual based on their experience on paper, only to be let down? Conversely, who of us hasn't had that rush of excitement when a candidate unexpectedly turns out to be a winner, surprising us at every turn with their responses, and reaffirming our belief in what we do as recruiters and staffing professionals? Regardless, it's a setup that's bound to produce interesting outcomes.

I'm not an interviewing guru. I don't sell my interviewing process in training sessions, books, or other products. The purpose of this is not to produce a best practices approach to interviewing. Rather, as someone who has done a lot of interviews (as a former corporate head of staffing and recruiting, and currently as a staffing and recruitment process optimization consultant), I'm in a position to share the following stories. Maybe you'll laugh, maybe you'll cry, maybe you'll snicker, but maybe, like me, you'll learn something as well.

So consider this an inaugural "Strange but True Interviewing Stories" article.

"THE RESTAURANT"

During my time in staffing for a consumer company, we had a search for a head of marketing. There was a woman who ran marketing for an entire restaurant chain whom my bosses (clients), the operational heads of the company, were particularly keen to recruit. This executive had attracted a lot of buzz because of her recent accomplishments and bold marketing initiatives.

After several attempts to contact her, the woman finally agreed to meet with me but would not travel to our city to interview. Knowing how important this was to my internal clients, I flew to her city and interviewed her in one of her local restaurants.

The interview seemed to go well and I remember thinking, "My bosses were right. She is solid." We talked about next steps and I mentioned we would want her fly to our company to meet with my bosses/clients. That's when the conversation took an interesting turn:

"So we'd like to fly you out to meet with some additional executives in our company," I said. "We're very interested in proceeding."

"I'd be interested in that," she replied.

"Great!"

"I'd be happy to meet with you and your company further," she continued, "but it would have to only be in one of the local outlets of this restaurant chain."

"Excuse me?"

"I said I can only meet you in one of our restaurants in your city."

"Why?"

"Because the world is a dirty place," she said. "There are germs everywhere and I don't trust cleanliness, food, or service anywhere but in one of our restaurants."

"You can't be serious," I said.

"I'm completely serious," she replied.

The problem was my bosses had already pre-judged her favorably and were sold on her!

Learning: When I returned from my trip, I had to take a pretty hard stand with my business leaders. They had convinced themselves that they needed to hire this person before we even called her. Now I had to convince them (even though it was my job to hire her), that she was not going to be a culture fit. It was a tense situation but I stood my ground. Ultimately, they agreed. What I learned was that as a staffing professional and recruiter, taking a stand to protect your company's business by not hiring someone is as important as trying to hire an elite person.

"THE HOTEL"

I once worked for a hotel company where we offered candidates the ability to fill out applications that had a short essay about why they wanted to work for the hotel. We had created an open, walk-in interview schedule whereby anyone could submit an application and we would interview anyone

Interviewing Stories (From page 2)

who had applied.

A candidate came in and filled out the application and was very earnest in his desire to work for the company. My colleague interviewed him and he seemed like a congenial, straightforward individual.

It was a busy day for us all and we didn't have time to thoroughly review every application before beginning the interview. During the interview, my colleague turned over the application to the back section, which included the short essay about why they were interested in working for the company.

He read the following:

I have spent the last several years as a male escort/prostitute. I have recently turned my life around and "found God." I am looking for a "real" job, something more stable and with a healthy future. When I was considering all the companies I might want to work for, I immediately thought of this hotel. I have done a substantial amount of business here — for which I hope you will accept my sincerest apologies — and always found it to be an incredibly nice place. It would be an honor to work here.

Learning: As strange as this was for my colleague and I, we really appreciated the fact that this individual was straightforward with us. Though he didn't get the job, we were very open and honest with him about why. It underscored the value to me of being open and accepting, yet at the same time being honest about what is appropriate and what isn't.

"THE INTERVIEW"

When I was head of staffing for a large entertainment company, we were doing a search for a particularly difficult role in which there was an individual whom we knew we wanted and who was very appropriate for the role.

It was nearly impossible to get through to him. We tried to reach him for weeks and finally did. Even then, he was reluctant to talk to us. He had worked for the same company for 15 years and was really not interested in making a move. Nonetheless, we persisted, and begged and pleaded with him to give us an opportunity to talk with him. Finally, he relented and agreed to come in for an interview.

He had mentioned at the outset that he had not really had to formally interview at all through much of his career. The interview began typically enough. I asked him questions about his life, professional experience, and so on. Almost from the very beginning, this individual shifted in his seat uncomfortably. Soon he began to sweat. Not perspire, but sweat profusely.

In the middle of a response to one of my questions, he popped up, grabbed a folder from my desk and started fanning himself, talking all the time. I asked if he was all right. He said he was fine. We continued our conversation, but his discomfort only increased. It began to make me uncomfortable. Finally, I asked if he wanted to take a break and go to the restroom, which he did.

About thirty minutes later, no word from him. Finally, realizing something had gone seriously wrong, I sent someone in to check on him. Apparently, he was a wreck. He had thrown up all over the place and had become overcome with anxiety. We offered to help him any way we could, and set it up so he could excuse himself discreetly through the back door.

Learning 1: Our problems with this individual began when we tried too hard to develop him as a candidate. If someone is very reluctant at the outset, there are usually reasons for it. It doesn't serve anyone well to persuade someone to do what they really don't want to do. We also could have done a better job of pre-screening this individual on the phone.

Learning 2: When we eventually followed up with this individual, he was very grateful for the way we handled this very awkward situation. We kept in touch and on a separate assignment, he ended up giving us a referral that was very helpful. It reminded me how important it is to treat those we interview with respect and how they do not go away. I can't tell you how often I've bumped into people in my personal life whom I interviewed in the past for a particular role.

"DOGGIE BAGS"

There are other stories.

I once, for example, was wooing a well-respected recruiter from a competitor and took him to lunch at a casual dining restaurant. During the course of our lunch interview, he proceeded to order a *massive* lunch. It was enough food for a family of six. That struck me as odd, but I could chalk it up to "I guess he has a big appetite and maybe eats his main meal at lunch." The problem was, he ate a normal-size meal and carried the bulk of his food out in doggie bags. I couldn't shake this creeping sense that he had just done his grocery shopping for the week.

We've all had experiences in interviews where people act strangely. It's part of the joy of recruiting and the unpredictability of human nature. But when that happens, here's what to remember:

1. The interview is a strange setup to begin with.
2. No matter how awkward the situation, always treat people with respect and dignity.
3. In certain types of roles, especially technical ones, star performers can be bad interviewers.
4. Individuals who have been with the same company for a long time may not be as practiced in their interviewing skills.
5. It's not what the interview subject does — it's how you handle it.
6. If someone does something peculiar or odd in an interview, consider it one data point that can be explored further during the referencing process (assuming it's not too peculiar or odd).

Contents Courtesy of Jeremy Eskenazi, Electronic Recruiting Exchange

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