

## 10 Signs Your Company Wants You Gone

By Deb Perelman

**You can't always save your job, but you can reduce the time you're out of work if you see it coming.**

When someone gets fired in the movies, it's always a melodramatic event. Typically, an employee walks into a regularly scheduled Monday morning pow-wow with their manager and find him or her joined by the HR manager, an attorney and a head honcho, informing them that their services are no longer needed.

Security guides them to their desk, watching as they put their half-dead plant, a framed photograph of their children and their coffee mug in a file box, and then ushers them out the door.

But in real life, learning that your company no longer wants you around is rarely a sudden incident, but a series of subtle events that, in retrospect, most realize they saw coming.

For example, long before there is a pink slip, there is often a breakdown in communication.

**"I think that there are subtle signs that people don't see, such as a slight change in your boss' behavior. Maybe they generally got back to you within 24 hours of your e-mailing or calling them and now they're getting back to you in two or three days,"** Chuck Pappalardo, principal and managing director at Trilogy Search, an executive recruiting firm, told eWEEK.

**"They're breaking patterns with you. Communication stuff is always subtle."**

There are plenty more where that came from, ranging from activities that are a little worrisome to those that are clearly going to be a point of no return.

**After the Pink Slip: How to Cope with Unemployment. Read more here.**

"There are certainly common signs that employees should keep a look out to assess their own personal job security," said Bernadette Kenny, chief career officer for Adecco Group North America.

"Important indicators and circumstances to be observant of include an industry downturn; company or department layoffs; being excluded from meetings; sudden reduced interaction with your boss; feedback that your behavior or performance has been lacking; any written sub-par performance document provided to you; a poor performance appraisal; new hires doing your job."

In short: You can't always save your job, but you can reduce the time you're out of work by seeing it coming. Here are some signs to look out for:

### 1. There's Been a Changing of the Guard

Your boss or immediate mentor has left and new blood has taken over, and no matter what you do you fail to win their support or positive feedback. Meanwhile, the CIO loves the new guy. This is never a good sign.

**"If the boss gets changed out, their direct lieutenants will probably be reshuffled too,"** Pappalardo said. **"The new boss wants to bring in people they've worked with before, that aren't connected to the old regime. You may not be moved out immediately, but you would want to be prepared."**

## 2. Your Office is Now a Cube, Your Cube Has Been Moved to the Pantry

Does everyone else on your level have an office and you're still in a cube? When they reorganized, did you end up with the office or the cube next to the construction zone, or in the darkest corner of the building? Sure, you can pretend it's not personal, but it might be just the kind of thing that you'll understand clearly in hindsight.

"If you're moved out of your office into a cubicle or into the basement, it doesn't just send a message to you but to the people left in your organization that it is a place where people are treated that way on their way out," Jim Lanzalotto, vice president of strategy and marketing at Yoh Services, a provider of talent and outsourcing services based in Philadelphia, told eWEEK.

## 3. Suddenly, Everything Is in Writing

Human resources requires a long paper trail to ensure your boss did everything by the book before they fired you. Maybe you and your boss used to discuss things over the phone, or you'd chat in his or her office and suddenly, you are receiving only formal e-mails, sometimes just to review the conversation you two have had. You'd be correct to be nervous.

"If you talk to people who have gone through the process of getting fired, they will say that there was a lack of communication over time. But just because everything is in writing doesn't mean that this is what it is about. Companies do things like this all the time for different reasons, such as making interactions more formal. While it may be good to be a little paranoid, it doesn't always mean something bad," said Lanzalotto.

## 4. Your Team Is Having Meetings Without You

Get the nagging feeling you're out of the loop? Did one of your co-workers reference a meeting you missed "because you were out that day", except you haven't missed a day in months? This may not just be a sign you've fallen out of favor with the powers that be, but that your relationship with them has reached a point of no return.

**"When it gets that bad, you've probably already reached the unsaveable zone. I don't think you're going to be able to salvage that relationship," Pappalardo said.**

## 5. You're Being Set Up to Fail

If you're being given undesirable, under-supported projects that nobody could realistically succeed in, it might be time to update your resume. Blowing it on a big or visible project is one of the fastest ways to get fired, and one of the most hassle-free ways for a company to get you out the door.

**"Putting you on a project that you're doomed to fail is fairly common; promoting you to a position that you're not likely to succeed in is another trick. It's a subtle way of saying 'move over,'" Pappalardo said.**

Meanwhile, the great projects—those that you would easily excel in—are going to others.

## 6. You See That They're Hiring for Your Exact Position

If your company was hiring another Software Architect at your level, don't you think you'd know it? So if you find a job listing that sounds alarmingly like your current position, it could be a sign that your company is arming itself with backup for when you're given the boot. Does this sound paranoid? Just ask all of the bitter people who may have unknowingly trained their replacement.

"Companies do this all the time. They have backup plans in case people leave, cross-training employees for other roles. While it's very nerve-wracking and paranoid, if you see it, you have to walk into your boss's office, 'I saw this ad. Is this my job?'" said Lanzalotto.

## 7. You've Been Promoted, but You Handle Less

Often called "kicked upstairs," these types of promotions are common when you've been with the company for some time, may not be unpopular and the company has to be careful how they exit you. Instead of firing you, you're given a fancy-

sounding title that means little because the role is away from the company's central line of business.

**"They're not doing a horrible job; you don't want the attendant employee morale issues that might come with firing them; you just don't want them in that role anymore," Pappalardo said.**

**"This doesn't happen in young companies much, but companies that are older where a lot of people have been promoted to their level of incompetence. There are certain positions that you can sort of slide people into that are career holding positions until they may retire or choose to do other things."**

## **8. You're Unpopular at Work**

Think it's no big deal that you and your boss don't get along? Think again. You're on the wrong side of that power relationship to have the last word. A manager can send an employee they don't like packing. If you don't have a lot of friends in the office, it can be even easier, as there will be no pushback from remaining employees if your position is cut first in a "downsizing."

"I think that when it comes to individual workers, there are reasons why individuals continue and not continue a job. But if you're going to let someone go because they're not well-loved, it shouldn't be coming out just when you're in a bad economic environment and need to make layoffs. It should have been aired out sooner and worked on," said Lanzalotto.

## **9. Your Company Has Been Sold**

There are few better known harbingers of incoming walking papers than your company being acquired by another one. It's rare that the company doing the purchasing is interested in the human capital of a company—they're after the customers and the products. Just ask the 300 DoubleClick employees, who gained the title on April 2 of being the largest-ever group laid off from Google.

**"There's a term of art by people who work in Silicon Valley: It sucks to be acquired by someone and it doubly sucks to be acquired by someone like Google or Microsoft. They're the smartest people on the block and they're rarely happy to see you," said Pappalardo.**

## **10. You've Been Asked to Reapply for Your Job**

One of the most classic corporate downsizing techniques is to force employees to reapply for the jobs they already have. Consultants are often called in to assess whether the worker is truly creating value for their company in their current roles, a thinly-veiled attempt to reduce headcount.

"It comes a lot of times when companies are in transition. Companies are trying to put themselves in neutral territory; they know they only have x slots left but y people. The message is: you may not be working here much longer and it automatically convinces people to change their jobs. They don't want to play musical chairs and the music stops and they have no job left," said Lanzalotto.

<http://www.eweek.com/c/a/Careers/10-Signs-Your-Company-Wants-You-Gone/>



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