



# THE PLAIN DEALER

## Termination anxiety In today's tense business world, workers often get the boot in cruel fashion

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Carole Rorrer was working at a Lorain County nursing home a few years ago when one day, while she measured medication for a patient, a boss approached.

Come to the office, she was told.

Once there, she got the employee's equivalent of a kick to the teeth.

She was fired.

She was ordered to surrender her keys, grab her coat and purse, leave immediately and never come back, according to Rorrer.

One of Rorrer's supervisors escorted her out of the building, parading her in front of co-workers and patients.

"I was in tears by that time," she says. "I was really humiliated. It was probably one of the most traumatizing moments of my life. It was terrible."

It's also not uncommon.

More and more companies, afraid their terminated employees will steal, sabotage or just go ape, are putting the "dis" in dismissal.

They have security guards watch the freshly fired as they clean out their desks and then walk them off the premises like Action News perps. Some companies have laid off workers using FedEx, voice mail or worse. Some simply lock them out of the building.

Last month in Los Angeles, NBC fired 14 staff members of "Access Hollywood" while they were on their lunch breaks, according to the New York Post. The workers found out when they returned and their key cards no longer opened the gate.

In August, Radio Shack used an e-mail message to lay off about 400 workers. "Unfortunately your position is one that has been eliminated," the message said.

In April, a sales assistant at a Cardiff, Wales, store that specializes in body-piercing and "street fashion" was fired with a text message to her cell phone.

The question becomes: Why are more and more employers serving their pink slips with a side of cruelty?

"There's a real, live necessity for doing it, but not necessarily as insensitively as some organizations are

doing it," says Jennifer Berman, managing director of human capital services for the Chicago office of Cleveland-based CBIZ Inc. "With technology today, an employee can do a heck of a lot of damage in five minutes."

In our computer age, a just-let-go worker needs only seconds to destroy files, sabotage programs or download client lists or proprietary information, says Berman.

"Employers have to be very careful."

In April, an outgoing employee at Goodwill Industries of Akron sent an e-mail to a co-worker boasting of "surprises" he was leaving behind on the computer system.

Seems he had lowered some of the system's security firewalls.

Goodwill told police that it had to spend more than \$3,000 to fix and re-secure its system, according to court records. (The former worker was charged with a felony count of unauthorized use of property.)

But having a security guard cracking his knuckles over a teary-eyed worker isn't the best way to prevent such sabotage, says Berman.

"I counsel employers on how not to do this," she says. "It's stupid. It makes people angry, which means they go and get a lawyer."

Not only that, it can demoralize the folks who weren't laid off -- the folks who are now stuck with more work, more stress and less job security.

Berman advises companies to plan and coordinate their reductions in force, to have support staff on scene and to move other employees somewhere else.

The Golden Rule, it seems, never gets old.

It's not only humane, says Berman, it's good business.

By going draconian, companies run the risk of seeing their heartless layoff tactics come back and bite 'em in the . . .

Ask the Accident Group, a personal-injury claims company based in Manchester, England. In 2003, the firm fired more than 2,500 workers via text message.

About 60 of them, wild with rage, stormed the company's office in Birmingham and grabbed "anything they could get their hands on," a worker told the Birmingham Post, including computers, coffee makers, even copy machines.

They then, well, escorted them out of the building.

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