

Fired By Text – And Other Termination Indignities

Ellen Chang Oct 16, 2015 3:51 PM EDT



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THE STREET

NEW YORK (MainStreet (<http://www.MainStreet.com>)) — When Marc Kruskol and his co-workers viewed the layout of the new offices of the San Fernando Valley, Calif. bank where they were employed, they noticed what appeared to be a huge glitch – several employees were not assigned a desk.

For several weeks, Kruskol, who was working as a customer service representative, and his friends nervously joked about the apparent oversight. It turns out that management was not remiss in leaving his desk off the drawing: the seating plan foretold a far more serious professional fate.

“That was my first clue that I wasn’t going with them,” said Kruskol, who is now the founder of MJK Public Relations in Palmdale, Calif.

When Kruskol was eventually brought into the office of one of the managers he barely knew, the manager expressed his apologies as he laid off Kruskol.

Inadvertent or unorthodox methods of termination are becoming all the more common-place in a modern, tech-addled world. As texting has emerged as a ubiquitous form of communicating, firing employees

(<https://www.mainstreet.com/article/how-soon-is-too-soon-to-quit-your-new-job>) via a text (emoji optional) is becoming more commonplace. And On October 13, Bart Teeuwisse checked his Twitter account first thing in the morning and discovered he could not access it, learning the harsh way that he was among the 8% of Twitter’s employees being laid off globally.



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I've been impacted by \$TWTR (<https://twitter.com/search?q=%24TWTR&src=ctag>)'s layoffs. This is how I found out this morning. [pic.twitter.com/MbjFwYLcU2](http://t.co/MbjFwYLcU2) (<http://t.co/MbjFwYLcU2>)

— Bart Teeuwisse (@bartt) October 13, 2015
(<https://twitter.com/bartt/status/653946266938818561>)

He updated his experience with another tweet that day mentioning that the company did call him to tell him about the loss of his job (<https://www.mainstreet.com/article/what-14-unemployment-means-for-the-class-of-2015>). Teeuwisse tweeted, "Found out differently though before I could get that voice mail."

Many companies are now utilizing unusual and non-traditional methods to alert people that they are no longer employees (<https://www.mainstreet.com/article/job-security-confidence-is-soaring-but-americans-still-dont-have-the-right-skills>) from disabling email access, deactivating an entrance badge to the building to hearing or conveying the news over a conference call.

One manager was on hold before a conference call started and did not ensure his mute button was on before he discussed his impending layoffs, which included several people on the call, according to a survey conducted by InterCall, the Chicago-based conferencing service provider.

Wrong Ways To Fire Employees...

These experiences are not only galling for employees, but the behavior conducted by these managers is also inappropriate, according to human resource experts. The firing of an employee should always occur in private so that the employee is not embarrassed or in a "public area where colleagues can observe or hear what's occurring," said Nannina Angioni, a labor and employment attorney and partner of the Los Angeles-based law firm Kadean.

Employees should be given a "succinct and clear reason" about the termination because it can lead to lawsuits, she said.

"Numerous wrongful termination lawsuits are filed every year simply because the employee doesn't understand the reason why he or she is being terminated and therefore concludes that the termination must somehow be wrongful," Angioni said.

Firing employees via a text message is disrespectful and does not give the employee any closure, said April Masini, an advice columnist based in Naples, Fla.

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"If you're not a Millennial, you're probably wondering how that could even happen," she said. "Try to hold back on firing someone by text. It's too easy to miss, misinterpret or emotionally gauge a person. You should want to fire them, not hurt them."

Some managers refrain from telling employees the real reason they are losing their job such as poor performance or behavioral issues and stick to the old standby strategy that the company is being restructured, because they believe the reaction will be less hostile, said Joseph Harris, a partner at White Harris, a N.Y.-based labor and employment law firm that represents management. A text can accomplish this non-accusatory, non-emotional process in a concise manner.

Managers know that many employees may feel blindsided by news of a termination and can be argumentative, and a text distances the manager from this vitriol and defuses the situation.

Do the Right Thing - A Text Firing Can Backfire...

The manner in which employees are let go also affects the remaining employees, and casual firings indicates "that you're not very invested in them, that you don't care and it can be incredibly demoralizing," said John Turner, CEO of UsersThink, a Pittsburg, Pa.-based company which provides a tool that delivers user feedback on demand for website landing pages.

"If you won't take a few minutes to deliver such bad news in person, why should they work hard for you?" he said. "Signaling that you invest in people, even in helping them as they're fired and walking them out the door, lets current and potential future employees know that you're serious about them."

And this is to say nothing of the emotional wounds a maladroitness termination can leave.

Even though the desk assignment firing mistake occurred 15 years ago, the memory of the oversight remains fresh to Kruskol.

"They definitely could have done it a better way," he said. "There's really no excuse for it outside of gutlessness."



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