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How to Spot Impending Doom

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Note to Readers: *This free e-newsletter, sent only upon request, comes from Dr. Kathleen Begley, owner of Write Company Plus communications training. She writes weekly on topics connected to business and personal success. Dr. Begley also does a blog called "Meandering to a Different Drummer." Click onto the website address at the end of this article to read her musings on life, death, and how to dye your hair pink.*

The economy gets back on track. Financial markets gain strength. The Recession is declared officially over. Considering these headlines, you might assume that layoffs, too, have become a thing of the painful recent past. But you would be wrong. Just the other day, I heard about a 25 percent workforce reduction – oh, heck, I mean one out of four people was thrown under the bus – within a division at a thriving multinational company.

The reasons for the massive departures are way above my pay scale. I figure that if the greatest academic minds on earth so far have failed to solve the economic woes facing the Obama administration, what do I know? But I do know the subtle indications that you may soon be let go. Looking back on my own experience being tossed into the street, I can see that I missed clear signals of impending doom.

PINK magazine, which itself recently had the plug pulled, has a handle on this distressing topic. In a recent article headlined "Pink-Slip Anxiety: Afraid You're Next to Be Laid Off," contributor Gail Evans discusses ways to hold onto your position. "To survive, make sure you are indispensable and your contributions are visible, and don't whine about how tough times are," she writes. "You want to be someone the bosses want to see every morning."

But I think you should back up a bit. To avoid getting cut from the ranks or to get a head start on your job search, you first need to be able to see the warning signs, according to Annabelle Gurwitch, author of the 2006 book "Fired: Tales of the Canned, Canceled, Downsized, and Dismissed." Gurwitch and I think you might want to start improving your performance or networking for a new job if you:

Notice different body language. When managers are on the verge of tanking you, they typically disassociate. A major tip off is that they start averting their gazes and turning their backs when you look at them. Hello!

Hear a new drumbeat. The new company mantra suddenly becomes "increase profits, increase profits, increase profits." Well, guess what? The fastest way for an organization to look good to Wall Street is to sack as many employees as possible. Smaller workforce, bigger bottom line is a sad but true law of business. Besides, decreasing staff is much easier for befuddled managers than increasing sales.

Lose plum assignments. If your weekly trips to London have been replaced by weekly trips to Birmingham, Ala., take stock of your career options. The dream travel usually goes to individuals an organization wants to retain. Face the fact: that group apparently no longer includes you. Networking, anyone?



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Get scratched. After 10 years of going to an annual executive retreat in Scottsdale, Ariz., you discover that your name has been cut from the invitation list. Uh, oh. It's time to call a recruiter.

Observe secret meetings. Before a layoff, the fire-ers usually meet several times to discuss the fire-ees. Closed doors and hushed voices may be a clue that you are about to be let go. Know anyone at The Ladders, a website advertising jobs paying more than \$100,000?

Struggle to get your evaluation. If managers have already decided to kick you out the door, they see no need to appraise your work in front of you. They've already done that behind your back. You may want to stop at a bookstore after work and pick up the latest edition of the job-hunting Bible "What Color Is Your Parachute?" by Richard Bolles.

Suffer the big switcheroo. You once worked on the top floor of your high-rise building in a private office near the company president. Now you're being asked to switch to a cubicle in the basement. Wake up, my friend, stop reading this article, and get thee immediately to monster.com.

Dr. Kathleen Begley has written seven books and gives corporate seminars on topics such as writing persuasively, presenting confidently, and managing positively. You can call her at 610-429-1562 or e-mail her at KBegley@writecompanyplus.com. She responds to everybody.