

Who Gets Promoted, 2nd ed., Ten Speed Press, manuscript pages free and open to the public for Career Repair chapter. Alert all your friends to this article!

Chapter 10: Career Repair

The Great Recession wreaked havoc on many, many careers. Millions of new graduates couldn't find employment at all, or accepted work well below their skill level. Millions of older workers whose financial plans were modeled on continuing high income found themselves struggling to find work at any wage. Breadwinners found themselves taking jobs outside their chosen field, at reduced pay, if they could find any work at all. These large social trends hide countless individual tragedies. To paraphrase Ronald Reagan, "When your neighbor loses her job, it's a recession. When you lose *your* job, it's a depression."

When you experience normal career development, you advance your skills and compound the complexity of your assignments over time. Your career is damaged if you missed a chance to develop on the schedule that you had intended. As explicated in this book until this chapter, each stretch assignment gives you a chance to experience new things, to triumph over adversity, to experience wins, or to fail at something and learn what you can do "next time." With stalled career development, not only is there no "next time" there is no "first time," either.

In addition to the lack of newly acquired skills, existing skills atrophy from lack of use. Skills you legitimately acquired in training or on the job wither away. Former supervisors lose their people management skills in roles as an individual contributor. Managers who used to exercise profit and loss authority lose executive decision-making skills as they execute strategies imposed on them from above. College graduates doing jobs that do not require a college degree can no longer remember why English 350 or Anthropology 101 really would apply in an office setting (and, of course, they do).

Economists say that young people were hit particularly hard in the Great Recession. New college graduates who graduated in the five years after the recession hit will earn, on average, twenty percent less *over their entire careers* than students who graduated before or after this infamous jobs drought, the worst since the Great Depression.

So, whether you are now 25 or 45 or 65, what do you do if you feel your career is damaged and needs repair? What do you do if you are under-challenged, underpaid, and frustrated? Well, the best course of action might surprise you: You need to restart your career. Have a cup of coffee, and make a plan. First, try to exhaust your opportunities with your current employer, then start looking for a job. Then, repeat this process continuously until your career is repaired.

* * *

We'll consider these steps in order, but first, a rant: Women have faced this career challenge for a century, but got no social or workplace sympathy for it. Stay-at-home moms experienced career damage when they tried to return to professional positions after taking time off to raise children. This happened to them whether they were home for one year or ten, and it happened even if they had an MBA from Harvard. Employers discounted their skills, and colleagues didn't help them, either. Weird terms like "domestic engineer" were invented to dress up and aggrandize the responsibilities and duties of moms, but the bigger point is that before they were

moms, professional women already had real skills that were later undervalued and under-applied for the rest of their lives. So as we consider how to fix this for men and women of all ages who suffered damage in the Great Recession, let us pay homage to those American moms who trained for success, started careers with big aspirations, and saw their prospects arrested by episodes of child rearing. They suffered in silent, isolated frustration, without articles in the *Wall Street Journal* discussing their plight and its solution. Every single technique in this chapter applies to returning moms and dads, as much as it does to careerists who got derailed by the recent major recession.

If you know someone who is trying to come back from a low spot in their career, would you do them a favor? This chapter of this book is on my website, free for anyone who wants it. Send them to www.donaldasher.com, and have them click on the “Career Repair” button, and let them get started with their own recovery.

Scalability & What to Do if Opportunity Dries Up

As mentioned elsewhere, rapidly growing organizations create explosive opportunity for advancement. Given a choice, join departments or organizations that are poised for growth cycles. But contractions bring their own opportunities. In fact, change of any kind can be managed to your advantage.

If opportunity dries up in your organization, watch for a chance to pick up new assignments and new responsibilities as headcount is reduced. Actively tell your boss, “You know, if you need me to, I can cover X as well as Y. Just let me know.” Get out ahead of the boss’s needs. Anticipate changes. You may be able to get a stretch assignment that allows you to become a superstar. Those who can solve problems in a crisis are highly valued and oft promoted.

If opportunity stalls, position yourself for the recovery:

1. In a crisis, be an engineer of solutions, and you can have a real career breakthrough.
2. Take a lateral position if you’re bored, stuck, or your boss is not right.
3. In any downturn, pick up headcount, clients, responsibility, and title, even if you may not be able to get more money right away.
4. Pick up skills, cross train with a colleague, and volunteer to cover somebody’s role during their vacation or leave.
5. Get out of your office! Go on a client call, go to a conference, go play golf with a competitor and learn more about your company’s ecosystem/environment.

A beneficial career skill is **scalability**. That’s the ability to do two jobs or three assignments, then hand off part of that and go back to your old role, or go on adding more and more responsibility, in infinite combinations. Scalability is actually an uncommon skill, and fast-track careerists tend to possess it. Look again at the transitions from supervisor to leader on pp. xx. Careerists with the skill to go in and out of these roles *temporarily* and *successfully* are immensely valuable to organizations, particularly those facing a lot of change and stress.

You might be able to handle two assignments at once just by working twice as hard. That's one approach. But the versatile careerists who excel at scalability do *not* just work twice as hard, because, for one thing, they were working hard already.

Scalability requires the ability to delegate and monitor workflows. It requires nimbleness, the ability to know when to step in to keep projects and processes on schedule, and when to trust that others are doing the jobs you assigned them. It also entails knowing when you need to push back a deadline in order to meet your boss's expectations. It is far better to postpone a deadline and meet it than to keep an unrealistic goal and miss it. And it involves knowing when something doesn't have to be done at all. One of the important discoveries about executive decision-making is that effective leaders can recognize when they don't need to make a decision, or don't need to act. That helps control work flow, too.

For someone skilled in scalability, work is like a fractal. It has the same complexity at any level of magnification. Yes, you may work harder if you take on two or three times as much responsibility, but you should adjust your scope and work flow planning so you succeed. If you just work harder and harder and burn out, you won't care if your extra effort results in a promotion or not.

Put Your Current Employer on Notice

One of the things that happens to people who are downsized, or who suffer an extended period of unemployment, is that they become risk averse. They settle for any old job, *because they have to*. But when the cloud of recession lifts, they continue to be risk averse. They get a job, but they just sit in it. This risk aversion is what creates permanent damage out of what should be a temporary setback.

Lots of people have temporary setbacks, but they don't all internalize them. They don't start to think, "Maybe it's me." They blame a wacko boss or the decision-making of distant executives or a temporary bad patch in the economy for their *temporary* career problem. They don't blame themselves; they externalize the cause of the problem.

However, people who suffer through long-term unemployment very often do internalize blame. They begin to believe, wrongly, that the job market has assessed their value, and that value is "not much." Or they just get worn down. They know they're worth more, but they're just tired, tired of trying to get that job or assignment that matches their true potential.

Finally, irrespective of the economy, some people let their careers drift on purpose. They have important things going on in their private lives that take up that spare energy that is necessary for ambition. They may have demanding teenage kids, a sick spouse, or they may even have some really important avocation such as building their own house that causes them to turn away from their day job for a period of time.

So, for whatever reason your career may have stalled, there is a formula for recovery. Career repair is possible, and the techniques presented here have worked for millions of other people. They'll work for you.

First, you must re-embrace risk. You must decide not to be satisfied any longer with the status quo. Your first step is to sit down with your boss and have another version of “The Conversation” explicated on p. xxx. It might sound something like this:

“Boss, I appreciate that I kept my position when many others didn’t, and I appreciate your support. However, I see things improving for the company, and for our group. I want to let you know that I’m ready for more responsibility. I’ve been a bit underutilized for a while now, and I’d like to get back into the habit of challenging myself and delivering increasingly valuable performance for the organization. I’m not in a hurry, but I do want you to know what’s on my mind. Is there any opportunity on the horizon that you can think of where I could advance, get promoted, or try a stretch assignment?”

Or more simply:

“Boss, I’m glad things are improving for our organization. I’d like to get involved in some of the new challenges. What kinds of assignments would I need to excel on to get noticed, and get considered for the next promotion that comes up?”

If your current employer doesn’t bring opportunity, then maybe it’s time to look around. Fast track careerists wring every promotion and skillset development opportunity they can from each employer, *but they don’t stay in a dead-end job once those opportunities cease*. Changing employers is sometimes the only way to move up. You can promote yourself by getting a better job with a new employer, or taking a lateral to join a new employer with greater opportunities in the near future.

One problem with doing two or three jobs during a downturn is that once things improve, you cannot always count on your employer rewarding your diligent service. They sometimes grow used to taking you for granted, or they may not realize your value. So, it is perfectly alright to push for acknowledgment, once the pressures of a downturn lift and the organization has more resources for staffing.

Here’s a script example:

“Boss, you know I’ve been covering two jobs for the company since the downturn. I agreed to take the new title with no pay raise. But things are improving now, and I’d like to be made whole. I’ve been looking at comparable positions and someone in my role should be making about \$20k more than I’m getting. Can we work on rectifying that now?”

If the answer is no, look for a new job in a new department or division, or look for a new employer. Don’t compound the problem by staying put.

[Does the following need a box or special design?]

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Cracking the Hidden Job Market

How to Get Any Job: Life Launch & Re-Launch for Everyone Under 30, or, How to Avoid Living in Your Parents’ Basement

The Overnight Resume: The Fastest Way to Your Next Job

If you want help with job search, I strongly recommend my job search books. If you are a young person whose career is in the launch stage, or needs re-launched, then check out *How to Get Any Job*; it's also the title of choice for anyone seeking a new career direction. If you don't know what you want to do next, get that book. It also helps beat that old conundrum: You have to have experience to get a job, and you to have a job to get experience.

If you do know what you want to do and you want to access the hidden job market, then I strongly recommend my groundbreaking book, *Cracking the Hidden Job Market*. This book reveals that fifty-five to eighty percent of all jobs go to someone who did not apply for a posted opening. The majority of jobs are never posted on the Internet. The majority of posted jobs draw competition from hundreds of applicants. *Cracking the Hidden Job Market* shows how to find jobs before they're announced, how to become the inside candidate even when the job has been posted, how to get perfect strangers to help you find a job, and how to outmaneuver the competition. Why compete with hundreds of others when you can use HJM techniques to be the only candidate for the position?

Finally, the demise of the resume has been greatly exaggerated. It is alive and well, though it is evolving. You still need a good resume for any job search, even one among friends. *The Overnight Resume* will help you turn out a quality document, quickly, that identifies your strengths and relates to the targeted opportunity.

I was recently on a radio show in Los Angeles, and the topic was college grads who couldn't get jobs. One caller after another said something similar to this: "I graduated eight months ago and I haven't gotten a job yet. In fact, I haven't even gotten an interview. I did everything right. I went to a good school. I got a good GPA. I majored in something practical. And now I can't find a job. Nothing."

"How are you looking for work?" I'd ask.

"I'm looking for openings on every major web site. I'm sending out hundreds of applications a week, whenever I see something interesting, that I think I could do."

No wonder they couldn't find a position. No one had ever taught them how to find a job. Learn how the job market really works, and you can find a job in any economy.

* * *

Counteroffers

In some industries, the only way to get paid fairly is to bring a counteroffer to your boss. Note the careerist on p. xx who used a counteroffer to get a raise above his pay band. Higher education and investment banking are two industries that are notorious for underpaying until forced to match an external offer.

If you are frustrated with the opportunities where you are employed, of course you should be on the market. And if you're on the market and you're a talented person, you're going to get offers. Before you leave an employer, though, give them a chance to make you delighted to stay.

One of my protégés is a future college president. That's why I help her. I'm interested in her success in both a professional sense and as a matter of personal interest. She called me because she got a call from a former colleague who wanted her to apply for a position as vice president of the flagship university in her state. It would be a step up in terms of scope and pay. "Should I apply?" she asked.

She was conflicted about going because a) she had just gotten a stretch assignment in her current position, b) her current president loved her, and had hinted that she could have his job when he retired, which was on the horizon, and c) her family life was particularly harmonious where they were. "Always go to the meeting," I told her. That's a career rule.

- Always go to the meeting.
- Always take the call.
- Always apply.
- Never self-select out.

So she applied. And of course they selected her for an interview. So she had to tell her president about the interview. I coached her to pitch it this way: "The recruiter called me and asked me to apply. I didn't expect to get the interview. I barely met the qualifications to apply. I just think it's a good idea, career-wise, to apply for something once in a while, to dust off the CV if nothing else. It's extremely unlikely that they would select me, and I can't go anyway. My parents live here, and my kid is in school. I'm just going to the interview for the practice."

He was not fooled by this speech. "I will give you a \$20,000 raise not to go to the interview," he countered. Of all the possible outcomes, that was *not* one that we had modeled. He knew she was a superstar and, if they interviewed her, she was very likely to get the offer. She took the raise and concentrated on her stretch assignment. That violates my rule, "Always go to the meeting," but I concurred with her decision. All rules have exceptions.

The New Covenant

In the old days it was considered disloyal to be on the market while you were employed. Those days are over. I think you should be on the market if not all the time, certainly from time to time. Then you know your market value. You have practice interviewing. You can keep your current employer on his toes. You can be brave and fearless in the pursuit of your job, because you are not afraid.

Organizations do not have loyalty to their employees. They will fire you the moment their interests diverge from yours—and *you should return the favor*. The new covenant is clear: You owe an employer a day's work for a day's pay. You owe reasonable notice to your employer if you quit; that's a week for lower level, two weeks for middle management, and a month at the executive level. This can be accelerated by mutual agreement. That's it. There is no more obligation than this.

So if your employer can provide challenge, rewards, and advancement, great. If not, make your move.

The ability to seek a job while you have a job is a skill you can learn. First, your Internet resume can be anonymized. Disguise your name. Use some combination of your middle name, your

initials, or your mother's maiden name, or name yourself after your cat. It doesn't matter. Don't give a street address. (Street addresses are disappearing from resumes anyway.) Use a private email. Use a cell phone number that is not associated with, or paid for, by your employer. Voilà! Your identity is disguised.

Next, change your current employer to a generic description. Thus, "Wal-Mart" becomes "A Major Retailer," and "Bank of America" becomes "A Major Commercial Bank."

Next, build a LinkedIn profile with the same name and information. It won't matter if you have no friends; prospective employers will know that you are in disguise. Be smart enough not to link to yourself or your spouse. Jobseekers *must* have a LinkedIn profile now, with all the right key words.

Be aware that employers do search for their own employees' job search efforts online, so think it through. Use these techniques with some prudence, and you can be on the market all the time. You can both actively apply for jobs, and passively lurk on career websites.

It is your prerogative to advance your career. Don't hesitate to pursue your own interest. You owe it to yourself and your family.

What follows is an interview with someone who repaired her career after seven years of unemployment. Note that her experience was not an immediate success, involved at least one major setback, and yet she persevered to get into a satisfying career. Her career is truly "repaired."

[INSERT INTERVIEW]

Interview with Lisa L.

Career Repair for a Returning Mom

"My first career I was a computer programmer. I liked it a lot. It was like getting paid to do puzzles. I designed accounting applications. I knew a little about accounting, but mostly I was a programmer. Then we started a family, and all that changed.

"I tried working and being a mom, but it wasn't working out for me. I didn't feel like I was making it at home or at work. My husband was not very helpful at home, so I made the decision to leave work and make our family life a success. Other people might have made other decisions, like maybe getting a new husband, but I did what was right for me and my family. I made costumes for holidays. I hauled my kid around to play dates and museums and activities. I was a big neighborhood volunteer. I cooked a lot, every meal, which is healthy and saves money. Besides, I like to cook.

"My career took a seven-year hiatus. By then my daughter was doing well in school, and was more and more independent. I decided I needed to get out of the house. I wasn't up on technology, so I couldn't get my old career back. The field had changed, and the kind of work I had been doing had all moved overseas. I didn't know what to do.

"My first job was working in a corner video store here in Brooklyn. It was a cult movie place, sales and rentals. I liked movies, and I enjoyed knowing all the neighborhood people and making

just the right suggestions for them, based on their rental history. I was doing the same thing Netflix built an algorithm around. I worked part-time, fitting it in around my kid's school schedule. The pay was close to minimum wage, though.

“I was there almost a year when a friend introduced me to a woman who ran a sports memorabilia shop, also in the neighborhood. She offered me minimum wage *plus* commission. The commission was miniscule, but it was more than I had been getting. Just for fun, I memorized a tremendous amount of sports trivia. I didn't have deep knowledge of any sport, but I could carry on a conversation. I was the top sales person in the store. I was even better than the owner, and she was a real sports fan. The odd thing is I'm an introvert.

“Somewhere in here my ambition reappeared. I began to think, ‘I'm worth more than minimum wage. I used to have a career, and now all I have are these random jobs.’ Then I went to a seminar by Don on career repair. He showed us these models for compressing a career by going through rapid transitions, by constantly looking for a new job while you have a job. I decided to go for it.

“I had been doing the paperwork and tax filings for the woman who owned the sports shop, because she wasn't any good at it. I decided to go back toward accounting. Out of everything I knew how to do, it seemed like the fastest track back into a professional role.

“I put out on all these social media that I could do bookkeeping and accounting for small businesses. My favorite site is one that features pictures of art openings. It's hyper-local. Brooklyn only. Who attends the openings, and who is being repped by which gallery—stuff like that. I bought a sidebar ad. It was surprisingly cheap. The first hit I got was a wealthy widow who needed a part-time personal assistant. The pay was *much* better than I'd been making. She liked me so much she paid for me to handle her son's business, too. He was a real momma's boy. He was an entertainment attorney with a solo practice, and doing really well, but she still bought his groceries and had them delivered to his apartment. His books were a mess.

“I found out that the bank was abusing and mismanaging the lady's trust, and I helped her break the trust. I was personally responsible for getting \$4 million released to her. I felt really good about that. But they were too neurotic for me, and anyway I was following the system Don had taught in the seminar. I was *constantly* looking for a better job. I was *constantly* networking and interviewing and hustling leads for something better.

“Then I got sidetracked by a business incubator job that sounded really exciting. I was supposed to be doing accounting and projections for a bunch of startups sharing this loft space. I had visions of being an early hire at the next Google or Facebook or whatever, but they lied to me. They just wanted a secretary. I was surrounded by these immature, impertinent and egotistical men, literally surrounded, as the admin space was behind a round counter in the center of this large room. One of them yelled at me about some UPS delivery and I stood up and walked out. Best move I ever made.

“Next, I worked for this really odd guy who owned a lot of businesses, but was a Presbyterian priest. Only in New York. So this was everything from party planning to setting up board meetings to hiring artists who specialize in iconography. It was fun, but I didn't feel like it was going anywhere.

“His church tried to hire me as an accountant. This was my first offer of a full-time professional position, and I was very tempted to take it. But I reviewed their books and suspected that they had an embezzler. I refused to take that assignment on the grounds that their controls were too weak.

“This was three years ago last spring. I realized it was starting to be tax season. So I hired a messenger service to hand deliver my resume to every boutique accounting firm in Manhattan. I addressed my letter to whoever had his name first on the door. It cost a fortune, but it paid off. I’m now doing high-net-worth taxes for individuals, trusts, and estates. Every single job I had prior led to my being hired by this group. They liked that I had been working with wealthy people and their finances. They loved my story about breaking the trust.

“It took six jobs in four years to get the one that matched my abilities, pretty much just like Don said it would. I went from \$9 an hour to \$75 an hour. I’m taking a couple of classes and then I can sit for my CPA exam. I can do this for the rest of my life. I really like it.

“And if I had stopped switching jobs before I reached my goals, I could still be helping that asshole jerk track his UPS delivery. Keep changing jobs, keep moving up. It’s a great system. It works. It worked for me.”

[END INSERT]

[insert quote]

“Our greatest weakness is giving up. The most certain way to success is to try one more time.”

--Thomas Edison

Job Hopping

Critics of my career repair system point out that I am encouraging workers to job hop. Yes, I am. I proudly admit it; in fact, I’ll proclaim it. Why? It’s in their self interest. When *talented* workers transition rapidly through a series of jobs, they are vastly benefited by the process. They compress career trajectories from decades into a few short years, or less. When untalented workers job hop, they have a series of laterals that don’t build skills or advancement. The difference is readily apparent to anyone who knows how to read a resume. And here’s a point I want you to get: *Employers reward job hoppers by hiring them.* Employers get it. They want the talent. Think about that before rejecting this system in favor of settling for underperformance.

I wrote this book for strong performers. Strong performers who get on the wrong side of career momentum are advantaged by job hopping until their careers are repaired. Young people who couldn’t find a challenging job with advancement potential in the Great Recession absolutely should job hop their way into exactly that situation now that the Great Recession is over. I repeat: They should change jobs until they find a challenging assignment with advancement potential.

Older workers who took lower positions to survive the downturn, also deserve to pursue assignments worthy of their skill levels. Quit just surviving and seek to be thriving.

By the way, you don't need to list every assignment on a resume. If while bouncing around with this system you take a position with no value to you, you are welcome to leave it off your resume. Do not leave jobs off a job application form that asks you to list all your prior jobs, but you are welcome to leave items off a resume that you provide to employers. Don't fudge dates. Just use raw years, as in 2012-2013. That could be two years or two days. For more on these techniques, see my book *The Overnight Resume*.

The Slide, and When to Start Your Own Career Survival Business

I watched a client of mine slide from earning \$500,000 per year to living with his mother, bankrupt, out of ideas, and out of options. How did that happen? He refused to get off the slide. He had offers for jobs at several points along the way down, and he refused them all because he thought he was still worth 500k. For economic reasons that had nothing to do with him, he was no longer worth 500k to anybody. So far as I know he's still living with his mother.

A friend's father slid from a VP of sales all the way down to making \$11 an hour working an inside sales phone bank for an industrial company. From deep into six figures to \$11 an hour. That's another slide that could have been halted at numerous waypoints on the track down.

If you are in a free fall slide, grab ahold of something! Take a less-than-ideal job to stop the momentum downwards. A CFO is much better off as a controller than as an accountant. A VP of sales is much better off as a major accounts rep than answering the phones in some bullpen.

Shelf life is an important issue for employers. During the last downturn, some employers refused to hire people who had been unemployed for very long. That was unfair, as many of the unemployed were good people who had a run of bad luck. But you have to do some defensive strategies if you face unemployment lasting very long.

First of all, get something more recent to put on that resume. Pick up some consulting. *Give away some consulting if you have to*. A city planner that I know was unemployed a bit too long, and she did a highest and best use analysis of a resort property that was for sale, and picked up a gig doing a strategic plan for a rural community. Problem solved. No longer a stale resume. These kinds of consulting claims need to be real, however, as employers will ask questions about them. In fact, offer the report or write-up in interviews, to show the good work you did. Get that raving letter of recommendation from the client, too, to prove the work was both real and valuable.

We all need to get better at picking up piecework during periods of unemployment. One economist predicts that forty percent of all work will be contingent within a decade, that is, part-time, temporary, or contract. Don't fight it. Figure it out.

Finally, *anyone who is unemployed nine months or more needs to start a company*. Start a consulting firm engaged in work similar to your old job. Teachers become tutors. Engineers become job shop contractors. Executives offer themselves up as interim and temporary officers. This works at all levels. In *How to Get Any Job* I recount the story of a college graduate who couldn't get a job, so he started a laptop repair service. He fixed an exec's laptop, and ended up getting a job as a traveling sales representative. He never would have learned of the opportunity if he hadn't met the exec under the guise of his computer repair company, a "company" he was

running out of his mom's basement. In fact, the job he got didn't even exist. The exec was so impressed by the student that he *created* the job to hire the young man.

Get out there and start something.

How to Get Fired Well

Getting fired well is a critical career skill. First of all, there is no career shame in getting fired these days. Almost everybody who is working today will be fired at some point in their career. I guarantee it. You can be fired because the business unit you are in gets cut, even if you're the best performer on your team. You can get fired because a CEO has a need to drive up the stock price in the short term. You can be fired because your boss is crazy, or needs someone to pin some blame on. You can get fired because it's Wednesday, and you wore a yellow scarf. You can get fired because the boss is a Vikings fan, and there you are, in that yellow scarf again. So, getting fired is not *in itself* a career disaster. But how you get fired can make all the difference in the world.

If you're going to get fired, engineer the terms of your departure. Get some agreement on what the organization will say about you. Negotiate an orderly and civilized leave taking.

While we're looking at this topic, let me give you some prudent advice: No matter what happened, forget about suing your former employer. People who sue are career pariahs, and the cost exceeds the benefit. Worse than that, the cost is immediate and certain, and the benefit is distant and uncertain. I know a guy who sued his company for hostile work environment because his boss was snorting cocaine and having sex at work with his new wife, an 18-year-old former stripper. He lost. I know a guy who sued his company because his boss hit him in the face, but no one saw the actual punch. He lost. At least get a great new job before you sue anybody. My wife sued a company that fired her for being pregnant. She got another job, then sued. She won. It took seven years.

Here are two stories of people getting fired well. The first one is a perfect example of "Business is great. People are wonderful."

[NTE: what do we put here to segue into the interview?? Maybe:

Interview with Krista K.: Have a Plan to Get Fired]

"I knew I was going to be fired, or at least I knew there was a good chance of it. I was executive director of this association, and I had already dodged being fired at least twice. The chair of the board was not a collaborative manager. He ignored the board and basically ran the association like his own family business. We were seldom on the same page.

"Once I saved my job by getting a board member to intervene, to create a wall of resistance to firing me by enlisting the other board members. That worked and the chair could not fire me. And another time I found out he was interviewing someone to replace me, and I poisoned the interview by planting some bad information about the person they were looking at. The information was true, but that's not the point. You have to protect yourself.

“Then he got me. He just walked in and said, ‘We’ve hired someone else. I’ll give you thirty days’ notice because that’s the terms of your contract, but I don’t care if you come to work anymore or not.’ I can’t say I wasn’t expecting it. I think he thought I’d go home and sulk, but I didn’t. I had a contingency plan for this. I called up the person they hired and said, ‘Congratulations! You’re gonna love this job. This is a great organization with a great mission.’ I didn’t say one bad thing about the chair and, believe me, there was plenty bad to say if I’d wanted. I promised to ensure a smooth transition to her leadership.

“Then I wrote my own press release for the chair to sign. I recounted all my accomplishments, that I had doubled the membership and tripled the association’s revenues, and grown the trade show to the largest of its kind in the world. All true. The chair didn’t want to sign it! ‘This makes us sound like idiots for firing you,’ he said. I wanted to say, ‘You *are* idiots for firing me,’ but I didn’t. I said, ‘You don’t want anyone to know you fired me. You want the press and the members to believe that everything is going great with the association. You don’t want them to hear of strife and disruption, do you?’

“The press release said that I was starting my own agency, which was true. Eventually he signed the press release and we agreed on what he would say as a reference. I never trusted him, so I never used him as a reference, anyway.

“I sent that press release to almost every media outlet in the country, and every thought leader in our industry. I’m still getting business off of it.”

[NTE: now, the next interview. Possible segue:

Interview with Marta P.: Tell the Story in Your Favor]

“My boss was basically a tyrant. He was passed over for the job of city manager, and then he just got worse and worse. Because of all the budget cuts we’d endured, there was more work than could possibly be done by the remaining staff. He’d give out too many assignments, then belittle and berate us for not getting them done on ridiculous deadlines. It was awful.

“I tried to make the best of it. I was working until ten o’clock every night. I never saw my family. I started making little mistakes. So in a way it was a relief when I got fired. He walked in and put a piece of paper in front of me that said I was fired, and asked me to sign it. I refused. He started yelling at me, and I said, in a really calm tone, ‘I am going to go home now. I think it is best if we discuss this at a time when we can control our emotions.’ Really it was all him. I didn’t raise my voice at all. Right in front of him I emailed HR asking for an appointment, then I got up and went home.

“I called my mentor right away. He works [in a different organization], but his advice was golden: to go into the meeting with HR *20 minutes early*. It was fantastic advice! By the time my boss got there, I had laid out my entire defense. I had a list of requests. I didn’t call them demands. I wanted to be laid off, not fired. I wanted severance based on the stress I’d endured. I was only willing to sign a general release if they agreed to my terms. I got everything I asked for, because HR knew he was a bad boss. I asked to participate in an orderly transition, to write a memo to our contractors. I even got to show up at some key meetings and let people know I was leaving. So I got to say I was laid off for financial reasons, which was plausible, because our budget cuts were all over the news. On my resume it said I was ‘retained through three rounds of

budget cuts,' which made me sound valuable. I got six months' severance. Plus, I was eligible for unemployment.

"Now here's the tragic part. The next day he fired my best friend at work. He yelled at her too, and she yelled back. He called security and had her escorted out of the building with a cardboard box of things from her desk. She got nothing. Absolutely nothing."

[end insert; end chapter]

Chapter 11: Advice Just for Women

You'll need to get the book to get this chapter. It's really great material, so I hope you will.