

# A recession relationship

By Deanna C. Stevens

Getting dumped in the workplace:  
It's not you, it's me

It has now been several months since I officially broke up with my favorite job of all time. The morning started like any other and I had no idea that my employer (The Divine Mr. M.) was about to dump me. Looking back, the signs were obvious.

Day before: Mr. M. is being exceptionally secretive (lots of closed door meetings) and also very chatty.

D-Day: At 7:30 am, Mr. M. is making piles of collated and stapled copies. (Hey, I didn't even know he knew how to use the collate feature.) By 8 am, Mr. M. announces a mandatory meeting for all staff to begin in 30 minutes. (Hmmm, we've never had surprise or mandatory meetings.) Ten minutes later, Mr. M. says we should order lunch for the staff.

Up to this point, I knew something was askew, but couldn't put my finger on it. However, when free food was added to the craziness swirling around the office—I'm talking lunch from our favorite barbecue restaurant, not the typical cold sandwiches and chips from the usual deli—I just knew it was going to be bad.

Anyone with a lick of relationship experience would have picked up on the signals: Mr. M.'s being unable to make eye contact and acting bizarrely one week before a major holiday. (You know, the proverbial pre-holiday breakup philosophy of thinking that if it's not going to work out, no need to take you home to meet the family.)

During the breakup meeting, I'm sure Mr. M. read from some corporate, legally approved script that included such words as "the office is closing" and "jobs relocated out of state." But I heard, "It's not you, it's me." In either case, just like that, I was reorganized out of a job as a senior-level office administrator at a pharmaceutical company after almost five years.

Well, really, not just like that. It took 11 months before the office officially closed. During that time, I completed my business degree, which Mr. M. had encouraged me to do, saying it would make our relationship stronger. The hope remained that I might move into another position in a part of the company that wasn't getting downsized. Mr. M. continued to woo me

with the promise of employment in a different capacity.

"Please don't leave, I'm sure we'll have something open up," he told me time and again. Foolishly, I believed him. But I was also torn. Should I stay? Or was it time to seek shelter in the arms of another who could provide secure employment, a great healthcare package, tuition assistance and a retirement plan?

I desperately wanted to believe things would work out and Mr. M. and I would be together forever. But in the end, I began to understand the lunacy of a dysfunctional relationship and how the handcuffs of future promises seem inescapable.

When the final day of work arrived, there was nothing. All of my former

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colleagues had hooked up with new employers. I left my key card on the desk and walked out of what had been, at one time, a warm and wonderful relationship, but was now reduced to a sad memory. "Us" had ceased to exist.

As any newly single girl will tell you, it's important to keep busy. I have filled my days with networking meetings, breakfast and lunch dates, self-improvement books and classes—as well as keeping in touch with anyone and everyone who has the power to bestow employment upon me or, at the very least, slip me the phone number and e-mail address of a corporate recruiter.

I recently picked up a book from Barnes & Noble entitled *On Becoming Fearless* by Arianna Huffington. I must admit I knew very little about the author. Nonetheless, the severely discounted price of \$6.95 caught my attention. I had a gift card burning a hole in my pocket and I couldn't

resist the evocative title. I mean, who wouldn't want to become fearless—especially anyone with the phrase "Looking for a job" big as you please on her LinkedIn profile.

To be honest, I also could relate to the book's fall from power and influence. This once acclaimed title was now banished to haphazard piles on the floor. In its place on the shelf sat the "Next big idea" adorned in a shiny new dust jacket. My once promising future also had been replaced—not by a book, but rather by a shiny new temp in another time zone. As anyone can tell you, losing a job or ending a relationship can create overwhelming fear. The rejection can be physically painful.

As I find myself in the throes of finding work, I'm struck by how this process is similar to online dating. I spend my days working and reworking my résumé and online persona, collaborating with a career counseling service (think eHarmony for the unemployed), checking my inbox for the 20th time today and, basically, as Huffington shares in her book, trying to twist myself into a shape I hope someone else could love—or hire—or both.

This experience has taught me that people really want to help—you just have to ask. And you can't take it personally when you don't hear back from a potential employer; sometimes they're just not that into you. I have discovered there is no substitute for caring friends, a strong professional network, a loving family, believing in your dreams, or an adoring dog who provides unwavering support (as long as the treat jar stays full).

Along the way, I have added some incredible new contacts to my network, reconnected with former friends and colleagues and had time to read some really empowering books. I will take Huffington up on her challenge and seek every opportunity to fearlessly evolve and be the best I can be. Remember, what doesn't destroy us makes us stronger. I choose strength.

And, by the way, do you know anyone who is hiring?

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