

## SHELL SHOCKED

### Are We Being Fired or Downsized?

By Art Stevens

“We would like you to submit your resignation.”

“Now why would I want to submit my resignation? I like it here.”

“Well, if you don’t submit your resignation, we’re going to can you anyway.”

What a dilemma. Should this person take the hint and submit his resignation or wait until he’s fired?

There are many words to describe the permanent separation of an individual from his job. And how those words are used determines the honor and dignity left after this traumatic act between an employer and an employee. But to those who think that “submitting” one’s resignation sounds better than simply saying you’re resigning, think again.

To say that you’re submitting your resignation may initially give you the impression that your move is considerably more honorable,

powerful and assertive than to say that you're simply resigning. But if you analyze that expression in greater depth, isn't submission an act of weakness? Of capitulation? If you submit to someone that means you're bending yourself to someone else's will. And if you submit your resignation doesn't that mean you're being forced to resign? Doesn't it suggest that you had no choice in the matter?

Being submissive is the opposite of being assertive. If you're asked to submit your resignation that situation doesn't allow for much in the way of assertiveness. And being relieved of your duties doesn't give you much relief either.

But being "downsized" may have nothing to do with the quality of the work you've been doing. You could be doing a great job but you may be one of five thousand employees who are being let go to save the company umpteen millions of dollars of overhead.

We live in a world of sound bytes and euphemisms but "downsizing" would suggest to me that you're pounding a person over the head with a hammer to make him shorter, which further implies that by so hammering that person you're diminishing him both physically as well as emotionally. If you start out at six feet four

and are downsized to five foot eleven, you're being literally downsized.

But do you remember the scenario on the assembly line when the supervisor didn't like the way Bill tightened those bolts and asked permission to fire him, terminate him, let him go, whatever? He didn't say I want to downsize that incompetent boob. He said he wanted to can him, another contemporary sound byte. And when he got approval to do so, the conversation usually went something like this:

Supervisor: Bill, can I see you in my office for a minute, please?

Bill: Sure. What's up?

Supervisor: Bill, you're not hacking it. Those bolts you tightened last week fell off the chasis within minutes after it came off the assembly line.

Bill: Well, boss, it was the wrench I was using. It wasn't holding. I need a new one.

S: We've taken that into account but that wasn't your only screw up. You've been screwing up consistently. Your performance just hasn't measured up. Your radar blip is well below our minimum standards for quality control. Last week you attached a fan belt to the gas tank.

And the week before you put a steering wheel into the engine block. I would say that you've been given more than enough opportunities to help us build quality cars.

B: I had new glasses which I was breaking in. I can see better now.

S: Bill, we've given you countless chances to demonstrate that you could perform on at least a mediocre level. But your performance is closer to catastrophic than to mediocre. We need to let you go.

B: You mean I'm being downsized?

S: No, you're being terminated.

B: You mean I'm being fired?

S: No, you're being asked to leave.

B: So if I'm not being downsized or fired does that mean that I can stay on?

S: Bill, you're not hearing me. You're being axed. That means we'll pay you for two weeks and you leave right now.

B: Is being axed the same as being downsized and fired?

S: Yes, I suppose it is.

B: Then why didn't you say that in the first place?

Bill isn't far off the mark. There are so many expressions to describe the painful act of being fired that he wasn't clear what was taking place. In his case he wasn't asked to submit his resignation. Nor was he asked to resign. He was simply told to hand in his wrench and get the hell out as soon as his legs could carry him to the door.

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