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YOU'RE NOT FIRED

Unless you're a backwards magazine reader, you'll have already digested our cover story on trends in employment and termination in our happy little industry these days. If you are a backwards reader and you're starting here, please go to the beginning of the magazine and read that story before you read this column. At the very least, glance at the monkey on the front cover. Go ahead...we'll all wait for you.

(Pause)

Okay, now that we're all literally on the same page, let's begin!

For the record, I've been fired twice in my life...both times without actually being "fired."

The first time happened when I was about 16. I was a delivery driver for a florist and absolutely loved the job because I got to make women happy all day by handing them pretty flowers. Then, I ran into a curb and just shredded a tire on the delivery van. The owners – normally nice people – turned ugly and wanted to deduct the cost of the tire out of my pay (which

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was some grand amount like \$3 an hour, I think). I told them I didn't think that was fair. They told me they didn't really need an extra delivery driver anyway and my position no longer existed...and I believe they actually did deduct the cost of the tire out of my last check, too. I was downsized and screwed before I graduated from

high school. Lesson learned: If your boss wants to get rid of you, he will.

The second time I was "not fired" was when I was kicked out the door at my old magazine nine years ago. I had been successful in many ways there, but I was also an arrogant dumbass drunk and I didn't work and play well with others in that big corporate environment. At the time, the place was run by humorless executives and investment bankers who didn't give a steaming pile of crap about my magazine or this market beyond the fact that there was a profit to be turned.

I knew I'd worn out my welcome so I told the company and my immediate colleagues that I was leaving to do my own thing but I wanted some kind of continuing role. We were negotiating a consulting deal that would have kept me involved as a figurehead and made my transition into self-employment a lot simpler. Since I felt my departure was imminent, I decided it was okay to booze it up at a trade show – despite being on double-secret probation for earlier issues with drinking. Someone who didn't like me much (still doesn't) ratted me out to the boss, a very nice guy who was forced to "not fire" me a couple of days later. Instead of being canned, I was "asked to resign." The bottom line was no consulting deal, no severance to speak of and a big friggin' mess for them and for me. I can't blame anyone else...it was totally self-inflicted...but they had decided they didn't want me around anymore – even as a consultant – and I gave them a convenient and cost-effective way to get rid of me.

The lesson I learned was the same one I learned in high school: If your boss wants to get rid of you he will.

Mistakes? I've made plenty. But I have gained some valuable insight

along the way, such as:

- Be nice. It sounds insane, but don't be a jerk to work with. Stay calm, don't yell and scream and don't take everything personally. Remember: this too shall pass.

- Instead of fixing the blame for every problem on someone or something else, just fix the problem. Eventually, if another person or thing is the real problem, fix it without anger or remorse.

- Learn. The only really stupid mistake is making the same stupid mistake twice.

- Add value to everything you touch.
- Try really hard to listen and remind yourself not to be the smartest guy in the room.

- Teach, don't lecture.

- Talk to your customers (golfers) as much as possible. Your job is to satisfy some need they have. Figure out what it is and how you can do it.

- Don't mistake your job with your identity. Your title is not who you really are.

- It doesn't matter who gets credit.
- Don't take it home with you.
- Everything is better if you work with good people and you're passionate about each other.

I'll leave you with a simple thought from the late Steve Jobs that captures how I felt about my experience with being "not fired" that may be some consolation to you when and if you face the same moment: "I didn't see it then, but it turned out that getting fired from Apple was the best thing that could have ever happened to me. The heaviness of being successful was replaced by the lightness of being a beginner again, less sure about everything. It freed me to enter one of the most creative periods of my life."

Think about it... **GCI**