

Wisconsin Park & Recreation Association

Career Center Tips: **Is Your Job Doomed?**



"You're fired!"

This isn't just Donald Trump's infamous catch phrase on "The Apprentice." Those are the two most feared words in the parks and recreation profession, or for that matter, any profession.

There are, of course, obvious times where people are fired for bad behavior or negligence. But what about those times when it's something far more subtle that casts a cloud of doom over your job? Factors such as complacency, a lack of communication and internal conflicts can put your role at your park and recreation agency on the extinction list.

Not to mention the external factors that you can't control, such as the state of the economy, the industry and your agency. When one or all of these is shaky, you can find yourself unemployed despite hard work and a good reputation.

Whether the result of your own doing or someone else's, getting laid off isn't on anyone's to-do list.

Career path detours

A park and recreation manager from Indiana learned the hard way that advice and feedback aren't always welcomed.

The manager had met the benchmarks of a successful employee: She oversaw a period of growth for the organization, solidified its [finances](#) and strengthened [strategic alliances](#). Despite all of those accomplishments, she was fired.

In retrospect, she realizes she made a few tactical errors at work. The job loss turned on two key factors -- her [management](#) of a key work relationship, and her [management](#) of herself.

The manager says that her conflict with her boss escalated to a point of no return. Before too long her boss had the votes to have her removed and pulled the trigger.

She also believes that her approach to problem resolution was flawed. She says she's proud of her work and what she and her team accomplished, but her focus was occasionally too intense. She took on a savior mentality, she admits. A lighter touch and a more objective perspective would have served her and the organization much better.

Pink slip prevention

The WPRA Career Center suggests that workers keep the following ideas in mind when trying to steer their jobs away from a pink slip:

Make yourself available in a smart and savvy way

A slowdown is a great time to reach out to managers and peers. Volunteer for new projects, but do it in a smart way. Don't say I've got nothing to do, say I've got a few things going on, but I'd like to get involved. Showing that you're thinking ahead will give you an edge.

Take calculated risks

The worst thing you can do is be complacent. Stretch outside of your comfort zone and expand beyond your [core competencies](#).

Volunteer for projects involving subject matter and skill sets that aren't necessarily in your background. Expand your skills, and make yourself more valuable to your current employer -- and your next one.

Be an instigator

Do things that add to your group's [infrastructure](#). Offer to write [case studies](#), compile [best practices](#) and even start new recreation programs or park services. The goal is to show that you're proactive and have new ideas to bring to the table.

Expand your network -- sensibly

Most people know that [networking](#) is always important -- although it's something that tends to fall by the wayside when people are too busy. Now's the ideal time to refocus on building [relationships](#) inside and outside of your group or park and recreation agency.

But be selective about who you connect to, and be realistic in your approach. Don't ask someone you don't know out to lunch. Instead, introduce yourself, explain your commonalities and ask if you may stay in touch via e-mail or phone.

Be present

This is the wrong time to say you're too busy for a new project, even if you are. Be happy to have it.

Don't say you can't work on something, ask for extra time off, look like you've been out too late or disappear for hours on end without letting people know. In slow times, appearances are more important than ever.

Be prepared

If you were ever a Boy Scout or Girl Scout, you understand the importance of preparedness. When the cause of a layoff isn't your performance but rather one of those uncontrollable forces, you still need a game plan. Here are some tips:

- **Performance reviews:** While you're still employed, get copies of your performance reviews. Because you weren't let go for productivity reasons, you can use your high marks to illustrate what you've achieved and how you would benefit a new employer.
- **Prepare references:** Throughout your career, keep track of which supervisors, co-workers and even direct reports would make strong references. Some employers want to hear from various colleagues, not just your boss, so know whom to turn to when it's time to gather references.
- **Keep your portfolio current:** Whether you're still employed or you've been laid off, constantly update your résumé with career achievements. When you learn a new skill set or receive an award, add it so that you don't forget to mention it when you're ready to apply for jobs.