

NEWSPAPERS LEAVES LAYOFF DECISIONS TO ITS WORKERS: ANALYSTS CALL IT COWARDLY ABDICATION OF RESPONSIBILITY



When a company needs to layoff a worker for cost-effective reasons and not because the employer is being disciplined or is unable to cope with the rigors of the job, it is faced with a dilemma: How do we sack an employee, just because we are unable to afford him or her? Many a time the employers share a personal relationship with the outgoing employee, developed over the years of working together and conveying such a tough management decision can be very difficult indeed. Another dilemma that raises its ugly head, is choosing who should go. If cuts demand that five employees have to be laid off, whom to put on the chopping block is another extremely difficult decision to make. Kansas City Star chose to embark on a new path, to circumvent making a choice when it came to choosing between two newsroom staffers. One would have to leave and the newspaper left it to both them to decide amongst themselves, who should go and who should stay on. Is it fair to pass the responsibility on to the workers? Is it not unethical and unfair that in a fit of sacrifice and upholding of high ethical values, one of the workers will relinquish a job that she desperately needs? Would she feel guilty and remorseful if she decides to stay on and watches her colleague and probably a friend, walk out of the door, with tears in her eyes? Analysts say that the practice, even though rare and atypical, is imprudent and could play havoc with the employee's sanity. The company's hiring department should make the difficult decisions before coming up with such bizarre duel-type solutions. Next they will be asking the workers to participate in a 100 meter race or participate in a "who can eat the most burgers in a minute contest." Hiring experts opine that asking employees to fire each other, would categorize amongst the worst management failures ever. However, the management cloaks it in more acceptable language, saying that one gets a good severance package and the other gets to keep the job it is a case of abdicating ones responsibility and shifting the blame on to the employee. Dr. Cassi Fields, a career expert said that he was shocked at what occurred at the Kansas City Star. He called it a cowardly act, adding that losing a job was in itself, a traumatic painful experience and by asking the employees to decide amongst themselves, worsened the situation making it an even more painful and distressing issue. The newspaper, whilst accepting that they had resorted to such a method, said that comparing it to "The Hunger Games," was not only unfair, it was wrong and exaggerated. It issued a memo saying that they found it disappointing that the matter was depicted rather inaccurately and that they regretted any stress or negative impact it may have caused to the two employees. Moreover, the newspaper continued, it was committed to work with the employees who would face hard times owing to the severance program and help them during their transition period. The newspaper could not resist taking a potshot at its detractors saying that the situation had been made even more difficult for its workers, through the "misinformation being reported." Incidentally, Karen Dillon and Dawn Bormann, the two workers who were given a week to decide, who keeps the job and who keeps the severance package, settled without too much bitterness or acrimony. Dillon chose to stay on as she had a family to look after. The question is, how would you have resolved such an issue? However, pressing your need, if you were Karen Dillon, would you have stayed on?