

Repurpose Your Life

*“Though no one can go back and make a brand-new start,
anyone can start from now and make a brand-new ending.”*
Carl Bard

It started like any other Monday. I had worked both Saturday and Sunday preparing for a meeting with my new boss. She had been on medical leave for several weeks. She asked me to brief her on what transpired in the marketing communications department I led while she was out.

I pulled together a comprehensive report, several visual aids and a short list of items that required immediate action, and headed to her office. As vice president of marketing, I assumed she would use my presentation to update the president later that day.

When I entered the room, she was waiting for me. However, sitting to her right at the guest table was a representative from Human Resources. That’s when I knew I was being fired.

I set my materials down and paused, giving my boss the courtesy to formally introduce me to the elephant in the room. It didn’t take long.

“Jim, have you met Monica from HR?”

I shot a sideward glance at Monica. “I certainly know Monica. What’s up?”

“Well, effective immediately, your job has been eliminated. Monica will explain the details.”

“Just a second. I’ve worked here seventeen years. I’ve been a high performing employee. Why is my job being eliminated?”

My boss gave me a blank look. “Your job has been eliminated due to duplication.”

“Really? What duplication?”

“Your job has been eliminated due to duplication,” she repeated robotically.

“I heard you the first time. What duplication?”

“She repeated herself again verbatim.”

It finally sunk in. This is a cost saving measure and she is literally echoing the company line.

“Job duplication.” They’re safe words to hide behind, disguise intentions, and prevent lawsuits.

My head started to spin and my career flicked through my mind like an old black-and-white silent film. Before I could regain my perspective, it was Monica’s turn.

“Let’s go through your severance package, Jim.”

This is when I felt the out-of-body experience. This happened to other people, not me. After everything I had contributed over the years? After such high performance reviews?

I slipped back to reality for a moment. “Monica, is everything you’re about to say in writing?”

“Yes, I will review it with you now and you can take it home, read it, sign it, and get it back to me.”

Her comment gave me permission to check-out of the conversation. Everything started to slow down. I was lost in another galaxy far, far away.

When I finally left the room, I collected my thoughts and called my staff into my office to inform them. I encouraged them to stay positive and continue to achieve our goals for the balance of the year. I cleaned out my desk, but unlike others, who were escorted out of the building, I stayed the balance of the day to say goodbye to many of my long-term colleagues.

I arrived home at about 5:30 p.m. and sat down with my wife, Karen. “I want to talk to you about something that happened at work today.”

“What happened?”

“I lost my job.”

“Yeah, right.”

“No, really, I lost my job.”

She shifted her weight on the couch and leaned toward me. “Very funny. What really happened?”

“My job was eliminated.”

“How could they eliminate your job after all of your accomplishments?”

“It’s corporate America. Everyone’s expendable.”

“Did you really lose your job?” She looked at my expression. “You’re serious!”

“Very.”

“Why would they do that to *you*?”

I paused, watching her process the news. She always saw a silver lining. I loved that about her. She quickly transitioned from shock to anger to what’s next.

After talking for thirty minutes she said, “I guess we’ll have to get ready for God’s next great adventure for us.” Her attitude lifted my spirits and gave me hope.

She leaned back. “So, what do you want to do now, Jim?”

“Well, I have a Plan A, B, and C. Plan A is to find something similar to what I was doing. Plan B is to start my own business again as a freelance advertising copywriter and executive speechwriter like I did before. Plan C is to retire outright if our financial planner thinks we’re ready. I’m leaning toward Plan A.”

“Are you sure you want to keep doing what you were doing?”

“Yeah. I love marketing communications. I’ve been doing it for forty-one years.”

“Forty-one years? Do you need forty-two?” The simplicity of her question was powerful and profound, and it stunned me.

“Ah, well, it’s all I know…”

She paused for a moment and then hit me again with the blunt force of a two-by-four to my forehead. “Forty-one years? When is the right time to do something different with your life?”

“Ah, now… I guess.”

I would later learn that my severance package included outplacement assistance with a leading career transition firm. As an older worker, near retirement, I embraced this service, became actively involved in my job search, and learned the most effective resume, networking, and interviewing techniques to find employment in today’s job market.

My job search was long and lonely. On one of the darkest days, I penned a creed to restore my perspective. A portion stated:

When I’m discouraged, I will remember:
I lost my position, not my skills,
I lost my salary, not my value,
I lost my benefits, not my health,
I lost my colleagues, not my friends,
I lost my role, not my reputation,
I lost my duties, not my identity,
I lost my livelihood, not my life.

Before I completed my outplacement training program, Debbie, the senior vice president of the career- transition firm asked me to consider Plan D in my job search. Plan D was to join their career-transition firm as a part-time consultant and spend my off time writing the articles and books I planned for full retirement.

Today, I’m a consultant for the largest career-transition firm in the world—and I’ve never been so fulfilled. I love helping professional people navigate through today’s complicated job search process. Training and coaching job candidates to land better jobs than they had before is gratifying for me—and life-changing for them.

It’s a second career that brings help and hope to people when they need it most. And, in the meantime, my nonfiction articles are being published and my first novel, *The Glimpse*, is now available online.

In Max Lucado’s book, *Cure for the Common Life*, he says, “We need to know how to step away from the game. We need regular recalibrations.” While I wasn’t happy when my previous job was eliminated, I understand why it was important for me to step away from the game, recalibrate, and do something different with my life.

In the end, for me, it wasn't about finding a new job; it was about charting a new direction, a repurposed life.

James C. Magruder