



onlyPulpandPaperJobs.com

Victim--the worst four letter word (but keep reading)

By Paperitalo Staff

OK, it is really six letters, but I figure with inflation over the years...

The point is made in the title, though: there is no worse thing you can be called or call someone else than "victim." Victim is a word that destroys self-esteem and leaves one with a complete sense of hopelessness. Victim is the vilest of labels. It is only widely used by those professions seeking their own gain, primarily lawyers and politicians. They use it thusly: "Oh, you are a victim, let me help you." They make a business (and a livelihood) out of exploiting the label they have placed on you.

I have never seen a victim on a dais receiving an award. Hollywood types love to adopt whole classes of victims, yet I have never seen a victim win an Oscar, an Emmy, or any other award in any category anywhere. On the day Lance Armstrong received the diagnosis, "testicular cancer" I am sure that many others did as well. Yet, Lance Armstrong (I have no way of knowing about the others) chose not to be a victim. He chose to fight and go on to do some extraordinary things. Not once when receiving accolades for winning the Tour de France did Lance Armstrong say, "I represent all victims everywhere." Rosa Parks, on that bus in Montgomery, Alabama, decided she was fed up with being a victim and resolved to do something about it. Victims don't make headlines.

Calling someone a victim or accepting the label victim is a poisonous, destructive act. True victims are found lying in the street, waiting for an ambulance to administer to their real injuries. True victims are helpless and need the help of others. Those falsely accused of being victims adopt the attitude of true victims and wait around for someone to help them. They allow their self-esteem and initiative to be destroyed by name-callers.

What does this have to do with you?

Industries, including our industry, are on hard times at the moment. I can almost guarantee that a number of you reading this column today are going to lose your jobs before this calendar year ends in just 56 short days. Companies will cut employment to try to preserve their business. They will do it before the end of the year so they can start 2009 afresh with all the baggage gone. That's just business and has nothing personal to do with you.

What does have something to do with you is how you react if you get the news the company no longer has a vision that includes your services. You can be a victim or you can take charge of the situation. When should you take charge of the situation? Right now. Before you even know you might be one on the list to be severed.

What do you do?

1. Prepare yourself for the visit from the boss that starts with, "Jane, let's sit down and talk a couple of minutes..." The boss will have some paperwork that they want you to sign on the spot, which basically gives you some goodies (cash, extended benefits, and so forth) in exchange for your immediate signature indicating your promise to not sue the company. Prepare your counteroffer now. Today, this evening, sit down with your spouse and discuss what would be important in a career transition. What would you need to give you the time and resources necessary to make a successful job change? Put this in writing and keep it handy in your personal papers at work.

2. Decide now, if the fateful day comes, what will be your actions. Have you talked to all of your contacts lately? Are you networking? If I may suggest, www.cellulosecommunity.org is a good place to do this (it's free, and headhunters are allowed to post jobs there for free). Is your résumé in order? Is there anything you can do in the interim to earn a living?

3. Decide with your family what expenditures you can do without. You may not want to cut them just yet, but if you have a plan made now, it won't be so traumatic if the time comes that they are required. Then you will just be executing your well prepared plan, not making decisions and executing your plan made in distress. The former is a position of strength, the latter is a position of weakness that may cause some long term damage. Whatever you do, don't cut health insurance, especially if someone in your family has a pre-existing condition.

4. Prepare to move. This may take some discussion with the family to determine priorities. If you own your home, start a cleanup plan and a light painting plan so that it is ready to sell. If you rent, get rid of your junk (just as if you were a homeowner), look over your lease and know what it takes to get out of it (this may be something you want in your counteroffer in 1 above).

5. What's the plan for where your career takes you next? Do you want to stay in pulp and paper? If so, I recommend tissue or packaging, the two long term viable grades. Do you want to live in another region? Have this worked out, too--what is the cost of living there, what are the job opportunities? Who do you know that can help you get a job there?

6. Remember, no matter what happens, you are not a statistic, you are unique. During the depression, unemployment exceeded 25%--an often-discussed number to this day. Yet, that means nearly 75% of the people that wanted jobs had jobs. No matter how bad things become in the near term, your own situation is special to you. Resolve to be in the 75% group (this is the attitude I used to mentally beat cancer--twice).

If you take charge of this situation now, you and your family can actually be disappointed if you don't lose your job! This is a much better place to be than walking in the door one evening, in shock, willing and ready to accept the label "victim." If you are in control, no way can you be a victim.

And, if you are not terminated by the end of the year, what do you do? Refresh your termination plan quarterly. Does this make you a quitter? No, I don't think so, it is just as prudent as keeping your last will and testament current. Or fresh batteries in your smoke detectors. Or wearing your seatbelt. Protect your livelihood like you protect your life.

Being prepared for involuntary termination is just like being prepared for safe operations every day. We never think we are going to have an accident, and we prepare to not have one, but, then, just in case, we also carefully prepare should one happen anyway.

Be safe and we will talk next week. And never, ever accept the moniker "victim!" ##