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Providing Clarity, Promoting Intelligence

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Dear David,

 Ara Norwood

Can you believe it's already midway through August? Time marches on!

I bring you some exciting content with this issue of *Uncommon Sense*.

In the **Self-Development** column, I share some thoughts about how to best handle the process of being terminated from your job.

In the **Elephant in the Room** column, I react to a Wall Street Journal Saturday Essay piece written by a liberal professor about the differences between his Leftist students and his more conservatives ones.

In the **From Ara's Journal** column, I mull over some random thoughts about serving others.

And the **World of Words** column brings you a zinger of a word you can employ right away to sound more intelligent.

OK, let's get started.

Ara Norwood

Self-Development

Getting Fired Intelligently, Part 1

A client of mine lost her job the other day. She was fired.

I probably don't know the full reasons for the termination. In fact, it's entirely possible that my client doesn't even know the full reasons. Employers are often very selective in what information they disclose during such times, because they wish to protect themselves. They worry that if they say too much, they might be vulnerable to a wrongful termination suit, something they wish to avoid.



Still, there may well be a complex of reasons my client was fired, some of which she is aware of, and some of which she remains in the dark about. But if there are, say, a total of 3 reasons why she was terminated, two of which she was informed of during the exit interview, she opted only to tell me one of those two reasons -- the one that was procedural in nature, and somewhat beyond my client's control.

At face value, the termination strikes me as unfair. Still, there are some things I would advise my client, and anyone who finds themselves in similar circumstances in the future.

First, as soon as it is clear to you that your employer has made the decision to terminate you, it is important to stay as composed as possible. The natural reaction of feeling distraught, brought on by the feeling of being rejected, along with the awareness that you may now be placed in a difficult financial situation, can be overwhelming, can cause one to be defensive or accusatory, or even retaliatory, making threats and otherwise behaving unprofessionally. But such antics almost always backfire and cause the employer to play hardball in an effort to unceremoniously get rid of you quickly. Trust me, you'd much rather walk out discreetly than walk out in handcuffs.

Instead, acknowledge that the decision has been made, and maintain your dignity to the best of your ability. If you behave professionally, your employer will be left with a positive impression of you -- and this in spite of the fact that they've decided to separate from you -- and this could come in handy some day.

Second, try to find out precisely why they are terminating you. Often times, this is pretty clear to begin with. But many times, the reasons are shrouded in ambiguity. So ask. Find out what they have to say, and write it down. After you write down the reason, repeat it back to them to make sure you didn't misstate the reason, and then, if they confirm its accuracy, ask them if this is the only reason. In other words, say something like this: "OK, so I'm being terminated for X. Why

else?" Keep asking that until they say there is no other reason behind your termination.

Find out how long they can continue the medical benefits. This is important. Some employers end the benefits the day they say goodbye to you. But others are willing to continue them through the last day of the month. Try to get them to agree to the latter.

Find out what kind of statement they might make to any future employers who may call to verify employment. If Human Resources receives such a call, they usually say no more than a confirmation that you did, indeed, work there, the dates of employment, your title, and possibly a confirmation of your salary. Human Resources will typically not state the reasons for your separation.

However, occasionally, a savvy individual who wants the skinny on a former employer's experience with you might find an inventive way to make contact with your former boss, bypassing Human Resources (presuming you didn't work in the HR Department.) This is why it is important to find out what your former boss might say about you if he or she receives such a phone call. Granted, you can't be 100% certain that what your boss tells you in this regard is the truth. But you might be able to sense whether the statement your boss would be making in such circumstances is harmful or helpful. The reason for knowing this is that if the statement from your boss would prove helpful, you can always proactively direct a future employer directly to your boss for comment.

Finally, after the pain has dissipated from your termination, take an honest self-assessment and have the courage to face reality. What did you do to contribute to your termination? Where did you go wrong? If you could do certain things over again, what would they involve; what would you do differently? It's almost never the case that a person getting fired is 100% innocent. Usually they failed to perform at their job adequately, or they had a personality trait that was unpleasant, or they did something unethical or criminal. I have nothing to say to those who do unethical or criminal acts. But if your problem is a social one, a problem in how you come across, or a problem you have getting along with people, look closely at that. Have the courage to face reality and own your behavior. If you are argumentative by nature, and if that is a big turn-off at your former place of employment, focus your attention on that undesirable characteristic, and actively work on eradicating yourself of that tendency. If you tend to interrupt others, same thing. If you have a foul mouth and use profanity, that is something to work on. If you have uncouth manners, you need to rid yourself of them.

Now, since most of you reading this are not in the process of being fired, and since most of you reading this may be largely unaware of any negative tendencies you bring to the table, find a mentor who can observe you in action, and ask them to provide with you feedback that is blunt, objective, and truthful -- even if painful to you. If you find the right person, someone with courage and integrity, chances are you will receive some eye-opening information that may be helpful.

That mentor may not spare your feelings, but may spare you from finding yourself in the unemployment line.


The Elephant in the Room

The Curse of Identity Politics

Every week, the *Wall Street Journal* publishes a piece called The Saturday Essay. The most [recent contribution](#) was written by Mark Lilla, a professor of humanities at Columbia University. Professor Lilla is a self-described liberal. In this, he is about as much an anomaly as I am being a conservative college professor, since more than 90% of college professors are neither conservative nor liberal but Leftist.

But Professor Lilla has done something that most liberals don't do (and no Leftist seems capable of doing) and that is self-reflect. He writes a fairly incisive and thoughtful piece. But it's not without it's flaws.

For instance, Professor Lila claims "It is time to admit that American liberalism is in a deep crisis: a crisis of imagination and ambition on our side, a crisis of attachment and trust on the side of the wider public. The question is, why?"

That's an easy one. The reason is because most of what he calls liberalism has been taken over by what is known as Leftism. The two have not historically been the same. But today, most of what was once liberal is now Leftist. And Leftism never has been strong on good  Brainwash ideas, healthy imagination, or depth of thought (though it has been prolific in lawlessness, the macabre, or just plain weirdness -- hence, LG became LGB, which became LGBT, which became LGBTQ, which currently stands at LGBTQIA. And don't fret: additional granularity of the latest sexual fads will add more letters soon.)

Mind you, Professor Lila's answer to the question is that liberals "got tangled up in the divisive, zero-sum world of identity politics, losing a sense of what binds us together as a nation." He believes, correctly, that the "classic Democratic goal of bringing people from different backgrounds together for a single common project has given way to a pseudo-politics of self-regard and increasingly narrow and exclusionary self-definition." And he goes on to say that such political ideology resonates with "young people in our highly individualistic bourgeois society -- a society that keeps them focused on themselves and teaches them that personal choice, individual rights and self-definition are all that is sacred." (They don't actually believe that individual rights are sacred or relevant for people that don't think the way they do; they only believe in their *own* individual rights.)

And Professor Lila accurately sees how these idiosyncrasies play out in his students: "As a teacher, I am increasingly struck by a difference between my conservative and progressive students. Contrary to the stereotype, the conservatives are far more likely to connect their engagements to a set of political ideas and principles. Young people on the left are much more inclined to say that they are engaged in politics *as an X*, concerned about other Xs and those issues touching on X-ness. And they are less and less comfortable with debate." That is true. Leftists are not comfortable with robust debate -- sometimes out of fear, but often out of a sense of superiority that they imagine absolves them of the need to

debate or discuss issues. After all, if you believe that conservative ideas are, by their very nature, hateful, bigoted, homophobic, Islamophobic, sexist, xenophobic, and racist, why would you stoop to debate them when you can work to criminalize them?

Professor Lila writes accurately: "Over the past decade, a new, and very revealing, locution has drifted from our universities into the media mainstream: *Speaking as an X*. . . This is not an anodyne [i.e., inoffensive] phrase. It sets up a wall against any questions that come from a non-X perspective. Classroom conversations that once might have begun, *I think A, and here is my argument*, now take the form, *Speaking as an X, I am offended that you claim B*. What replaces argument, then, are taboos against unfamiliar ideas and contrary opinions."

An accurate description of the situation in our colleges and universities. However, Professor Lila left out one key detail: it is Leftist college professors who spend most of their waking hours successfully brainwashing the vast majority of their students to think in such flaccid, ludicrous terms.

And that, my friends, is the latest elephant in the room.

Check out [my website](#) for tools to help you with your career, your presentations, and other matters.

From Ara's Journal

What Really Matters?

There is nothing quite like making a difference in the life of another person. One of the great thrills of my life is to find a person that has a need that I am capable of filling, and then doing so. Helping someone get out of a jam, helping someone who is down on their luck, opening a door for someone that desperately needed to be opened for them. . . . these things seem to stand out above most everything else in my life to bring me purpose and *raison d'être*.



Journal
Writing

Of course, this means that I must carry a burden to continually expand my network, my awareness of resources, my skills, my credibility, etc.

But as long as I continue to have a willingness and an ability to impact for good the lives of others, I sense I will be involved in a noble undertaking that could have profound consequences.

Plus, it will make this world a better place.

The World of Words



Zeitgeist, n.

Pronunciation: zītīgīst

Meaning: This word, taken from German, (from Zeit which means time, and Geist which means spirit) refers to the defining spirit of the times. Think of it as representing a certain mood of a particular segment of history, as shown by the ideas that are prevalent, or the beliefs and norms of that particular time.

Usage:

- *The story failed to accurately capture the zeitgeist of the late 1960s.*
- *The marketing campaign, in order to be successful, must take into account the zeitgeist of the region in question.*
- *A new zeitgeist seems to be unfolding before our eyes, based on an abandoning of time-honored standards of decency and decorum.*

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Sincerely,

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