

OPINION

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## Woolley Marketing: The night before Christmas – t'is the best time to be fired?

*In his regular column for Mumbrella, Trinity P3 founder and global CEO Darren Woolley reminds us no matter how good an employer you think you are working for, the real measure of an employer is how they let you go.*

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by [DARREN WOOLLEY](#)

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In my 15 years of working in advertising agencies, I was made redundant three times. Some would say if you have never experienced this in advertising, then perhaps you were never really working in it. The difference here is between being made redundant and being fired for cause. The first was due to the agency no longer being solvent. The next was a restructure I should have seen coming. And the final one was the opportunity to set up my own business and hence the successful existence of TrinityP3.

Why is this relevant? Particularly at this time of year?

Well, from this limited experience with being made redundant, it made me realise that no matter how good an employer you think you are working for, the real measure of an employer is how they let you go. Either by your choice or theirs.

In the face of current economic uncertainty, many agencies are predicting a downturn in the new year, with reports of advertisers already withholding budgets or reporting a cut in their budgets for the coming year, and already cutting staff numbers with significant redundancies in the weeks leading up to Christmas.

This trend has become so apparent that [Calum Jaspan, producer and host of Mumbrellacast, raised it on last week's episode](#), citing a number of agencies who had recently cut staff numbers.

The irony is that the same agencies making the staffing cuts now have been part of the vocal industry chorus complaining about the talent shortage and the associated cost of attracting and retaining that talent this year.

It could be that those high-price talent acquisitions and retentions have come at a significant cost. From my own experience, there are many reasons for cutting staff. Loss of a client and the associated revenue, agency restructuring, and the ubiquitous 'right-sizing the head count' ratio. The last one basically means to cut jobs to protect the company profit margin.

So, given that there are many reasons to make an employee redundant, the question is – when is the right time?

Is there a good time to be firing staff?

While we hopefully all agree there is never a good time to fire anyone, it is often something that cannot be avoided, for the good of the organisation and all those working there.





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A colleague in human resources at a major corporate provided several compelling reasons for why the nights before Christmas are a good time to tell staff members not to come back next year.

While it may cast a dark cloud over the holiday festivities, a healthy and generous redundancy can be a bonus. It also allows everyone left with a job to return in the New Year to a fresh start, rather than making the redundancies at the start of the year.

And while finding a new job during the holiday period is always a challenge, it provides the person who has lost their job time to reflect and prepare for the job opportunities that arise in late January and February. This is where the provision of EAP and outplacement services are essential.

And this is the point. Most of us have professionally survived a once in a century global pandemic. The associated talent crisis appears to have helped employers discover that their employees are more than a pay cheque and a headcount. To attract and keep high quality and high value talent requires offering flexibility and providing personal rewards and acknowledgement, alongside the financial considerations.

It will be interesting if this same attention to staff wellbeing and care extends to when they are asked to exit. It is said that it doesn't matter how well you treat your staff when they work for you, the thing they will remember is how you showed them the door.

No-one wants to make their colleague redundant. But if you invest as much effort and care into the process as you do to attract and retain your staff, you have a chance that the experience can be positive for at least one of you.

As another old friend in human resources told me, if you do it right you leave the person with their dignity and self-respect intact, and they are better placed to go on to bigger and better things. I know in my case, the best thing that happened to me was being made redundant from my last agency job three weeks before Christmas. Happy holidays to you all.



Woolley

Trinity P3 founder and global CEO Darren Woolley

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Santa 7 Dec 22

Good perspective Darren. I keep hearing the mantra that it is bad form for companies to let staff go in December but I strongly disagree. It is bad business and bad for people to keep them lingering around and being unprofitable for that extra month. Let them and the agency get on with life and don't waste that extra 1/12 of their remuneration when it could be used to keep the agency going and build strength. That notwithstanding I do think that 'the night before Christmas' is a bit harsh. Ideally if you know it is coming you can do it by mid December.



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