

The CYA Guide for Professionals

Cover Your (Career) Assets



Before you leave your job.

A WonderSpirit White Paper Resource

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The 'CYA' (*Cover Your Assets*) Guide for Professionals

Notes

This guide is a resource and checklist to help you prepare for the day you will leave your job. Maybe you will leave by choice. Maybe you've outgrown the job and need more challenge. Or maybe you just KNOW it's time, your heart and soul are calling you elsewhere. Maybe there are other reasons... Change happens, we grow.

Sometimes the leaving is not our choice. It comes quickly and unexpectedly. This guide was written with you in mind.

Life is uncertain. Job security is a perception we hold. Another perception is that employers act in the best interests of their employees. Sometimes. And sometimes not....

There are **three things** you need to remember:

1. The **Company's job** is **not** about looking out for your best interests. The **Company's job** is about doing what's best for the Company's business—and or the business owner(s).
2. Your **boss' job** is **not** about looking out for your best interests. **Your boss is primarily concerned** about keeping his or her boss

happy and looking out for the **Company's** best interests—and of course, his or her own best interests.

3. **All jobs are temporary**—even when they last 5, 10, or 15-plus years.

As a professional, there is always a possibility your boss will call you in one afternoon and tell you that you have been ‘released from employment,’ that ‘your position has been eliminated.’

It often happens just that fast. As a matter of practice, there is usually no warning when professionals are let go. The information is kept in the strictest of confidence on a need-to-know basis: those who made the decision, including the top-level Human Resource staff person (unless that's who's being let go), the assistant who prepares the severance agreement, and someone in the Information Services Department.

What most don't realize is how well coordinated the timing is. At the same time your boss and or the HR person are breaking the news of your termination to you, the IS Department is discontinuing your computer access and building access. You will likely be allowed to come back later and clean any personal belongings out of your desk. Anything on *your* computer, however, will probably not be available to

you.

If it happens tomorrow, will you be ready? What information, *intelligence assets*, **your intellectual capital**, do you want protected and easily retrievable when they escort you out the door?

The scenario plays out again and again, in businesses both large and small, in big-name companies and no-name companies. The employment relationship rules have shifted. Layoffs, downsizing, economic factors, reorganizations, mergers, market conditions, and simply management decisions to make a change, are commonplace. It's the nature of business in modern times.

What you CAN Do

First, don't take it personally—and don't dwell on it. And don't spend time worrying about it. (Yes, easier said than done.) Second, know that many have lost jobs before you. They survived. And many of them are now better off because of it. Know that displacement can happen to you at *any* time. It is not something over which you have control.

What you CAN control and DO something about is to be proactive and prepared. There ARE at least six positive, strategic

actions you CAN DO NOW to be ready when it's your turn to leave—by your choice or otherwise.

1. Take the High Road.
2. Identify and protect your intellectual capital assets.
3. Create a Warm-Fuzzies file.
4. Document your accomplishments.
5. Create a professional development plan.
6. Be positive and present; utilize the NOW.

1. **Take the High Road**

As an employed professional, take the high road. Ethics, honesty, integrity, hard work, a positive attitude, and decency will never go out of style and will be to your personal and professional credit in the long run. Both respect and reputation are earned. More than any credentials we carry; the respect and reputation we have earned among our peers and associates will last, and will open or close doors to us in the future. These character traits speak clearly of who you are and what you value. And it is these that will differentiate you from others.

2. **Identify and protect your intellectual capital assets.**

Make a list of **your intellectual capital** assets. Intellectual capital assets are pieces of information, knowledge, and know-how you

have acquired, created, or developed over time throughout your life and your career. They are keys to your effectiveness and happiness, and perhaps to your future career successes.

Start with your contacts file, business card binder, and book marked Favorite web sites. Consider co-worker contact information, such as direct phone numbers, email addresses, and job titles. Are there clients and other business associates for whom you want to have contact information?

Have you created any systems, resource lists, or ‘cheat sheets’ you use regularly and effectively in your job? These are the kind of *intellectual capital* you want to be sure to have a copy of for yourself—SOMEWHERE ELSE other than the office, electronically and or hard copy.

All computers, voice mail, email systems, phones, furniture, file cabinets, et cetera, are company property. Treat them as if they can be copied, monitored, intercepted, and removed from you at any time.

3. **Create a Warm-Fuzzies file.**

Moving forward, create a ‘**Warm-Fuzzies’ file**—maybe several—if

you don't have one already. A warm-fuzzies file is a brag file, a file folder where you keep all of the positive, complimentary affirmations you receive about your work and your self. Warm-fuzzies files can be electronic files stored in your computer or a physical file in your desk drawer or file cabinet. Any correspondence that makes you feel 'warm and fuzzy' inside goes here. When a rough day hits, do a little reading from the file. These files also serve as wonderful testimonials and documentation of your accomplishments.

For physical files, **store them somewhere other than your office desk**; for electronic files, create a backup regularly and store it on your home computer or someplace else off site.

Remember that **everything** in your office **at the company belongs to the company**. *Your* computer, phone, and furniture are company property. A lot of companies have monitoring capabilities and use them. The company has the right to access everything you keep there, and can monitor any correspondence sent, received, or downloaded.

4. **Document your accomplishments.**

Keep **documentation of your accomplishments**, your

performance, and updates to your credentials. You supplied the company with your resume when you were hired and you filled out a company application form. If you didn't keep a copy at the time, ask someone in Human Resources for one. It should not be a big deal, and it's not an unusual request. Your employment history dates are simply easier to copy than to remember. And it's important that they are correct on future employment applications. Potential employers routinely verify this kind of information for accuracy. Take the resume copy home and file it there.

Next, consider any **coursework, training, or certifications** you've completed that can be included with your credentials. Keep originals or copies of certificates and other documentation in your home file also.

Then look at **your work history with the company.** In the time you've been with the company, what positions have you held? This is easy to track if you kept copies of your past business cards.

List the people you have worked with, bosses, co-workers, and people who reported to you. **Think about who would make a good reference and be able to speak knowledgeably to your abilities.**

What are some of your most impressive **accomplishments** and **project** assignments? Make note of them. Keep a journal or a file somewhere. Is there documentation anywhere to support your accomplishments? For example, there may be notes or emails from your boss, colleagues, or customers, or notes in performance appraisals or professional development plans. Keep a copy for yourself.

Are there **forms, systems, or programs you designed or developed** that should be included in **your professional portfolio** as well, something that has streamlined work, saved time or money, or just something really GOOD, creative, functional, or beautiful of which you are proud? When they walk you to the door, **what work of yours** do you want to make sure you have copies of, and documented credit for, in your possession?

I want to make it clear; I am not suggesting or advocating that you to do anything unethical. As a professional, you are aware of confidential information and trade secrets of your business or industry that should not be shared outside of the office. Respect that. What I am suggesting is that you separate **your intellectual capital** from the company's products or services. It may be a fine line.

Systems, programs, original art, and administrative forms are generally re-usable in other contexts. If those ideas came from you, they are generally your intellectual capital. Having said that, there may be situations where you will want to consult an intellectual property or patent attorney. **Make sure you find an attorney that represents originators**, rather than employers.

5. **Create a professional development plan.**

NOW is a good time to **create a professional development plan** and begin to implement it. Consider what you *really* want to learn about, and the career path you aspire to.

Take the time to design your **plan**. Think about five years from now. What do you want your career to look like? How about your work-life balance? What role(s) do you want to be holding? What is important to you? REALLY important?

Then **think about the experiences**, the qualifications, the competencies, the characteristics, and the contacts you will need to develop between now and then. **Which of those can the company help you with?** Which ones do you need to do on your own? And who needs to be aware of your career ambitions? A mentor perhaps? How can you let them know?

Work with a coach on the visioning, design, strategizing, and follow-through process. Find a mentor, or more than one. Learn what you need to. Grow. Be creative. Be open to possibilities. And **take especially good care of your self**—in a healthful way. **YOU** are the one with the most vested interests in doing so.

In whatever role or job you have, **you** will always be the one who will look yourself in the mirror every day. Will you like what you see? Will you be happy?

What are you passionate about? What are your natural interests? And how could that fit with your present career? Can you **re-frame what you want** to help your boss see clearly how it will be in your boss' best interests and the company's best interest's to help you?

6. **Be positive and present; utilize the NOW.**

Be positive and present, and **utilize** what's already in place for your benefit **and** the company's.

The company's success can be to your personal and professional advantage. For better or worse, the company's name will always be part of your resume from this time forward. It doesn't hurt to have a

successful, well-known company name included on it; and it might help. Look for win-win, mutually beneficial opportunities.

Does the company have a professional development program, tuition reimbursement, or education assistance available? Are there monies budgeted for employee training? These are **funding vehicles** available to you. Take classes, go to seminars, further your education, request a personal coach, develop your strengths, and become more proficient and capable in the skills required for your job now, **and** ones that could complement your job going forward.

Education and training are never wasted. **It's up to you** to take the initiative, make the proposal, and use what you have learned, and grow from it. It's up to you to ask for what you want and follow through. Few have mastered those mind reading skills.

Life is what we make of opportunities presented. And Life is also what happens while we're making other plans. It's always a *dance* between factors we can control and those we can't. Be *present* for it. Work with it. Honor its rhythms and the adventure of living.

Enjoy your job, the work you do, and the people you work with. They are all catalysts to your creativity and collaborators in your

career connections. **Do your part** to help the company succeed and thrive—as long as your values and ethics are not compromised in the process.

Extended job security in one place is probably a luxury of the past. In its place, new opportunities open, including the opportunity to work with and learn from many dynamic and creative professionals, as well as some not-so-dynamic or creative ones too. It's all part of your education and training for the next project in this *school of life*.

Today's professionals need an entrepreneurial spirit, a sense of self-confidence and self worth. Noted author and business thinker Tom Peters coined the term 'Brand YOU' many years ago. In his more recent book *Re-Imagine!* (Dorling Kindersley Limited, 2003) he adds that you've got a new boss, and it's *you*.

This is not a gloom and doom paper. It is offered as a **proactive guide to positive measures** you can take and use to your benefit, right where you are now.

*When life hands you lemons, make and market lemonade **and** develop a line of fabulous products that use lemons!*

NO ONE ELSE has more of a vested interest in taking care of your best interests than you do. Take especially good care of your self—YOU are your most valuable asset.

No one else is exactly like you or brings the exact mix of talent, knowledge, and character that you do. Know and value your strengths, who you are, and what you're about. Keep your resume up to date and enjoy the learning adventures life brings.

In the meantime, remember and implement the **CYA strategies** presented here, especially the ones that are elemental to who you are and what you do. Be true to your best self. The world and its workplaces have work for you.

If your boss calls you in and tells you that you've been released from employment, you may not be happy about it. You will, however, be more ready than you've ever been to move forward positively to embrace new possibilities. Opportunity always knocks in job loss situations. The universe has its own impeccable timing... *Dance* with it!

When you find your passion, the last thing you need is permission. And if there's not an organization doing what you feel led to do, you create your own.

Pam Grout
Living Big

Anne Wondra
Spiritual Wellness,
Career Coach,
Writer, Workshop Leader,
Speaker

About Anne Wondra

My name is **Anne Wondra**, and I'm the founder and president of **WonderSpirit Resources, Inc.** Over the past 25 plus years, I've worked and studied in the fields of law, religion, education, youth ministry, and human resource management, and I've achieved professional certifications in all of them. Over time, I discovered that I instinctively look for and see the good in people, their 'strengths' – often ones they don't recognize in themselves. I've also discovered that I'm a consumer advocate, drawn to helping individuals look out for their own best interests.

I have German Midwest farm family roots, and I grew up Catholic. My career has included ten years in a law office, an undergrad degree in religious studies and education, several years as a parish director of youth ministry, a graduate certification in human resource management, and more than a decade as a corporate human resource administrator and training, development, and wellness specialist.

My passion is helping people live happier and healthier lives, freeing their spirit and talents, and opening them to more possibilities. I start from the perspective that you are good, gifted, talented, and beautiful. My role is helping you see it and free it, so you can use it and share it. Life and work, meaning and money. There is more than one way to make a million, and there are ways that honor your soul in the process.

I'm a writer, speaker, workshop leader, and life coach. My specialty – spiritual wellness, business, and life skills.

To learn more, visit www.wonderspirit.com.

