



LIFESTYLE

Pink slip etiquette

Many tighten up and cut back on personal services

By [Rosalind Bentley](#)

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Sunday, March 29, 2009

Though they haven't been hit by layoffs, Holly Calmes and her husband figured they could nip and tuck their budget. What better place to start than with household services they could do themselves?

That's when things got hard. The Calmeses, of Hiawassee, have had the same twice-a-month housekeeper for a decade and have shared with her some of life's milestones and challenges: grandparenthood, chronic illness, grief.

"We are more than employer-employee; we are friends," Holly Calmes said.

But letting the housekeeper go would save \$200 a month.

In this economy, our frugality can cost someone their job: a hairstylist, the lawn guy, a personal trainer, a housekeeper. How do you pink-slip a personal service provider if you have a bond with them? We talked with experts — and providers — who say there is a right and wrong way.

How did Calmes do it? How should you do it?

Do not fire by avoidance, phone or e-mail

David Jones has owned his small pest control service, Pride Pest Control, for a decade. He calls on many of his friends. In the past few months, however, a growing number of them have not called back to schedule service. When he has caught up with them, they've either lost their jobs or, in some cases, their homes. "I can see how it would be embarrassing to say to people, 'Hey, I lost my job so I can't afford this anymore,'" Jones said. Don't make someone like Jones chase you, says Peter Post, president of the Emily Post Institute. "It's just like breaking up in a relationship," Post said. "Have enough wherewithal to have a face-to-face; otherwise, it's just not being respectful."

Give two weeks' notice

Maybe your employer gave you a day's notice when you got laid off, but have the decency to give people in your employ the standard two weeks, said **Brandon Smith, a senior business management lecturer at Emory University and principal of Core Growth Partners, a business consulting firm in Roswell.** You can give more than two weeks if you want, but don't feel you must give a severance check unless you employed the person full time.

For goodness sake, don't cry. Be direct

The last thing you want to do is deliver a verbal sandwich to the housekeeper: good news, then bad news, then good news, **Smith** said. You're so great, I love your work, but we've got to get rid of you, but I hate to do this because you're so great. Be direct, be honest, but don't beat around the bush. "Say, 'Here's the decision and here's why.' Otherwise it leaves the person confused, and they don't know what just happened to them."

But if the person starts crying ...

Offer some tissues. Listen. Don't be afraid of their tears, and let them cry it out "however long it takes," **Smith** said.

Offer a letter of reference

Or a referral if you can, Post said.

Entitlements end

Don't expect the housekeeper or baby sitter to hold your spot open on her schedule on the chance that you'll return when fortunes do. "Tell them, 'I don't expect you to hold this slot for me.' By heading that off, you're making an awkward situation easier for the other person," Post said. But do let them know that when you can afford their service again you'll see if they can find a new space for you.

Road map

Once you've delivered the news, sit down with the person to help them develop an action plan, **Smith** said: Can you put the lawn care guy's business contact information in your neighborhood newsletter? Can you give the personal trainer other leads? Ask these questions, but only if you can follow up on any promises you make. "They will leave the situation feeling more positive because they feel like there's a plan," **Smith** said. "The fear comes when they leave not knowing what to do."

Meet in the middle

Never offer to allow the person to do the same — or more — work for less money. That's rude. But maybe there's an alternative. Madeline Hall is an elementary school teacher in Acworth. When her husband's hours got cut as a transfer truck driver, Hall decided she could save the family money by cutting monthly trips to her aesthetician for facials, her one personal treat for herself. She called the aesthetician to say she wouldn't be coming anymore. "But rather than lose me as a customer," Hall said, the woman suggested Hall come every six weeks instead of monthly. And she promised to apply any salon discounts available to the services. Hall now goes every six weeks.

Don't do it

If you sense your \$80 every two weeks is essential to your hairstylist's or housekeeper's ability to pay the rent, scour your budget for other ways to save — if you can afford to — maybe forgoing restaurant meals or weekly movies or by car-pooling. Whenever possible, keep a we're-all-in-this-together attitude if it won't put you in debt, said Peggy Newfield, founder of the American School of Protocol in Atlanta. "The cutting always starts at the lowest point, and those are the people who need the paycheck the most," Newfield said. "I'm not going to do that."

As for Holly Calmes of Hiawassee, she and her husband did let their housekeeper go, though "we just really did not want to make that call," Calmes said. "I was very blunt, but I told her that we know things will get better. As soon as they are, I will call."

ELIZABETH LANDT / Staff

Illustration of a person trying to weigh the importance of saving money vs. employing people who provide services

ELIZABETH LANDT / Staff

Illustration of a hand holding a pink slip