

Cut off from the water cooler

CRAIG SILVERMAN

FROM MONDAY'S GLOBE AND MAIL

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When Tony Blair left his job at the end of June, he told the British House of Commons: "I wish everyone, friend or foe, well, and that is that. The end."

He left to a standing ovation and then, after mere hours of unemployment, he moved into a job as the special representative to the Middle East for the United States, United Nations, European Union and Russia. Then he joined the foundation board of the World Economic Forum.

It would appear the former prime minister has landed on his feet. Yet Mr. Blair will undoubtedly miss the trappings of his former role: the famous residence, state dinners, a team of ministers and a large bureaucracy under his direction, as well as phone calls and meetings with world leaders on a variety of important issues.

Whether by choice or the decision of others, the loss of a job brings with it the loss of the people and routine that defined it. The jobless often long to be back in the comfort of their old cubicle, joking in the office kitchen with colleagues, feeling a sense of belonging. It's not the paycheque they miss most; it's the people and the routine.

Internet Links

- [Blog: Silverman on work culture](#)



"You're doing something day in, day out, and you're used to the culture," says Tim Cork, president of career transition company NEXCareer and author of *Tapping the Iceberg*. "It's a comfort zone. Then, all of a sudden, you're taken out. It's a big change."

Jonathan Zentner, 31, formerly a project manager at a Montreal manufacturing company that closed down in April, confesses to missing his routine and colleagues.

"Because it was a machine shop, I was dealing with some guys who were real characters," Mr. Zentner says. "Some of the foremen were straight out of a movie. They were almost like Fred Flintstone."

Mr. Cork says the most powerful aspect of work culture is the "club within a club."

"Whether you are in IT or marketing you have your own area and group and that is the strongest culture," he says. "Those bonds and relationships can have their own living, breathing culture."

A sudden break from that group can leave workers feeling cut off from something that only days before was an integral part of their lives.

"It's the loss of good friends and comrades, and people say, 'Geez, I don't know if I'll still be in touch,' " Mr. Cork says.

He recommends getting back in touch with former colleagues to solidify the friendship bond and maintain a link to the culture.

"You can test out who really are your buddies and friends and who aren't," he says. "It's an awfully good time to test that ... see who steps up."

David Jacobs, 40, was recently downsized out of his job in the IT department of a large non-profit organization in Ontario. The e-mails he's received from former colleagues have helped him realize the camaraderie that he felt was real.

"The people I used to work with were terrific, so I consider them friends," he says. "I'm looking at all possibilities [for a new job] but I'd like something with a similar culture. It was a culture of teamwork, and of doing something for the community and giving back."

Although Mr. Blair bid a fond farewell to his former colleagues, his wife felt little camaraderie with one particular group.

"I don't think we'll miss you," Cherie Blair shouted at reporters as she made her final exit from the official residence.

Well, no one said you have to like everything about your old job.

PLEASE DON'T PANIC: HIT THIS IF YOU DO

The concept of an Easy button in a Staples ad campaign was so appealing to office workers that the company began selling them in stores. But the buttons were just a toy. Not so for the USB Stress Panic Button (\$17 U.S. from Usb.brand.com.hk). This big red button, emblazoned with the word "PANIC," connects to your PC and can be punched in times of extreme frustration. It either triggers a countdown that ends with an explosion on your screen, or will engage the Boss Punch Out - a middle-manager type getting socked. It can also be set to bring up an Excel spreadsheet to camouflage your slacking.

MRS. EASTER BUNNY: A VIXEN'S WORST JOB

"The worst job I've done was performing in the role of Mrs. Easter Bunny in the Hudson's Bay department store cafeteria Easter show. It was called *Carob, Tastes Just Like Chocolate*. We did four shows a day. It was pure hell!" Canadian actor Kim Cattrall told the Bang Showbiz wire service. Although in some ways, playing a rabbit is not that far removed from her role as Samantha Jones on *Sex and the City*.

MURDER IN THE MINE: UNDERGROUND ABUSE

The Chinese government has announced it will overhaul workplace practices after it was revealed workers in coal mines and brick kilns in some provinces are toiling under slave-like conditions. Shanghai Daily reported that "illegal employment practices, abduction, restricting workers' personal freedom, employing child labourers and even murder were uncovered" at brick kilns. Some kiln owners in Shanxi province "made use of fierce guard dogs and hired thugs, who bashed labourers, adults or children, at will."

BY THE NUMBERS: I'M BETTER THAN YOU

73

Percentage of executives who believe they could do their boss's job better, according to a survey of executives in more than 70 countries by recruitment firm Korn/Ferry International. Yet 42 per cent of respondents rated their current boss's performance as excellent or above average, while 11 per cent called it "poor."

35

Percentage of executives who said they don't trust their boss; 65 per cent said they do. But they want the job anyway.

On globeandmail.com/life

Why do you procrastinate?

Craig Silverman thinks he knows. Read about it on his blog.

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