

# Protecting you companies digital assets

He stood staring out the window of his tenth floor office in the Control Data building with tears in his eyes. After over 20 years working for the same computer company, he was given less than an hour to pack up his belongings into a single large box and say his goodbyes.

My boss then looked over to me that day back in 1984

and said, "Deans, don't miss the writing on the wall like I did." That day burned into my soul which carved a corporate survivalist instinct enabling me avoid standing in a similar window packing my stuff into a single box.

Twenty-five years later and it looks like hard times may be here again. With business slowing down and budgets tightening, some area companies are letting employees go, leaving me with some unpleasant work to do.

Businesses have to do what is necessary to keep operations running. In a perfect world it would be great to have everyone employed all the time.

The real world forces managers to make hard decisions just to keep things running. It may sound harsh but it's better to cut pay or reduce head count then



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to fall into complete business collapse like we saw a couple of weeks ago at Lawrence Marshall in Hempstead.

For those companies having to make those critical decisions there are some technical bases you need to cover. From the employer's perspective they must transition smoothly using fewer people and maintaining good

productivity.

Some of the issues that need to be addressed are the data and computer resources of those about to be laid off. Before the deed is done the computer workstation or laptop of the so-to-be-released employee needs to be secured.

This is a precautionary and important step to prevent any opportunity for an upset worker to damage the company's hardware or software asset.

With desktop computers that are connected to a company server the simplest way is to lockup the PC logically by changing the password. Just as the worker is called to the supervisor's office for the termination, the person that takes care of the IT tasks needs to immediately change that worker's password and lock the employee's worksta-

tion by hitting the Window's key (just below the "z" key) and the "L" at the same time.

As far as employee laptops, make darn sure the laptop is at the office and secured before the termination proceedings begin. Basically the laptop needs to be removed from the office just as the dreaded meeting starts.

After the termination, the worker should be accompanied by a supervisor and allowed to collect their personal items but not access any company computers just to be on the safe side.

A couple of times over the past several months I have had to restore deleted files from angry employees that had just been fired or even thought they were about to be released.

Again, here is another big reason for good and timely backups. Just before a round of layoffs it is imperative the IT guy verifies the backups were successful and clean. Also, secure those tapes or external hard drives so they cannot be stolen or damaged.

No company wants to end up like the architectural firm in Florida last year whose paranoid worker deleted all their CAD drawings along with all the backups nearly destroying the company. Data loss for corporations can be devastating and could be the end when

times are already tough as it is.

During the personal item collection time the laid off employee may request to copy some personal data like contacts, pictures and other digital documents that are on the company's computer. This can get sticky and do not let them do this unsupervised. The best way to handle this is to tell them that the company will extract all personal data and mail it to them on a DVD or flash drive.

I do not recommend extracting it with them there since it can take too long and drag out a difficult and emotional period. If there is no way around it then have some 1 GB thumb drives that you can give the employee and have the IT person download the data to it.

Avoid trying to burn CDRoms since they only hold 650 MB and DVDs take too long to record.

My word to employees is to do your best to avoid this situation by making yourself too valuable to release. In small businesses, some employees have to wear many hats and perform different tasks for the company. That is what got me through numerous cutbacks and layoff rounds.

Usually the first to go are the underperformers, ones with personality conflicts, or others with limited skill sets.

The more stuff you can do for a company and the better you get along with people, the less vulnerable you are to the corporate hatchet.

Starting now, volunteer to learn and perform other jobs and tasks at work. Request training for new positions and help out others to learn what they do for the company.

Get your fingers into as many pies as you can. Increase your skill set inventory and make the company dependent on your productivity. Make that manager see you as the last one on the list to cut.

Avoid any conflicts with co-workers and especially supervisors. Remember, one of the keys to staying employed is being pleasant to work with.

Do not conduct e-mail wars or fuss with other workers about unimportant issues. Show up on time for work and perform well while you are there.

Bottom line: As times get tough, employers need to protect their digital assets while employees need become more valuable human assets to the company.

Next week's column: OCR.

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