

**Career Planning**

## **Why You Should Fire Yourself**

by Ron Ashkenas

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When management changes were announced at General Motors earlier this month, most people focused on the firing of CEO Fritz Henderson and his replacement by Chairman Ed Whitacre. The more significant moves, however, were those that took place afterwards when Whitacre promoted a number of younger managers (including two women) to key positions. Taken together, these shifts (with more to come) sent a strong message to everyone in GM that it was time for fundamentally new perspectives and faster decisions.

But why did it take a virtual purge for GM's executives to realize that it was time for change? Wasn't bankruptcy, a federal bailout, a near-death experience, and international embarrassment enough of a wake up call? Didn't former CEO Henderson and his team understand the urgency for turning around GM?

Unfortunately, the GM situation reflects the reality that most managers become enamored with their own strategies and have trouble breaking free of their tried and true patterns. In other words, even when we intellectually understand that the world has changed and we need to do things differently, it's difficult to let go. We become

invested in what we've created and how we've learned to do things. And it's not just managers at a troubled company like GM; it's all of us.

Jack Welch used to gather his senior executives together in January and tell them to act as though they had just been newly appointed to their jobs. What would they do differently if they were coming in to their business without preconceived notions and with a completely fresh perspective? It's a powerful question, and one that most of us never ask ourselves.

Naturally, it's easier to take a fresh perspective when you really *are* new and when the assumptions you are questioning are not your own. We're all more comfortable challenging someone else's thinking than stepping back and critically assessing our own ideas and behaviors. That's why Ed Whitacre needed to shake up GM's management team — because the incumbents couldn't get enough distance to challenge the way things had previously been done.

But why wait for your company to get in trouble and for the board of directors to shake up the management team? The turning of the calendar year is a good time for every manager to take stock and think about what you would do if you were starting fresh. So here's a thought-exercise you can do: First, take a deep breath and fire yourself. That's right — take yourself out of your job so that you'll get some distance from it.

Second, consider what you would do to reapply for your job. What are your qualifications? What would you say in an interview about the changes you would make and the improvements you would engineer? What unique “stamp” would you put on this new job? How do you feel about the business strategy and the quality of the leadership team? What would you change?

Answering these questions candidly and constructively can not only help your business to thrive — it also can reenergize you for the coming year.

And who knows? Maybe you'll end up re-hiring you.

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