



# WorkZone: Navigating a change in company ownership

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By Steve Twedt / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

New company ownership brings fresh perspective, new ideas ... and plenty of stress for employees who've grown used to a certain rhythm and culture at their workplace.

"It's definitely not an easy thing to tackle," says Nancy Slomowitz, CEO of the Washington, D.C.-area Executive Management Associates Inc. business consultants. "It's not easy for the people coming in and it's not easy for those staying in the establishment."

Ms. Slomowitz knows this better than most as she has been on each side of that equation, first as controller of a small firm bought by an international conglomerate and later when she inherited a competitor's 12 employees as a condition of landing a federal contract.

Her lesson for those who find themselves under new management is simple: Don't delude yourself into thinking the new owner will consider you invaluable or irreplaceable.

Ms. Slomowitz, then in her 20s, said she lost her controller's job a month after the conglomerate came in — not long after she was given the unpleasant task of laying off her own staff of three.

"I was devastated and very negative about what had happened. How dare they do this to me? When in reality, it had nothing to do with me. This is a part of life. It can happen to anyone at any time."

With the perspective of some years, she realizes now that new owners often "already have their infrastructure in place. You may be a big fish in your small company but when an international conglomerate comes in, you're disposable. They come in and pick your brain and let you go."

Her advice: Buck up. Don't go negative and don't band together with other unhappy coworkers for unproductive gossip.

"That will mark you as a troublesome employee and you will never advance. They're observing you and how you interact with others. Let go of the negativity and rise above it."

Despite the initial hurt and disappointment, Ms. Slomowitz said things turned out well. She eventually found a better job and, looking back, she thinks her old job would have been a career dead end.

She's also experienced management change from the new owners' perspective.

As her contracting business was picking up years later, Ms. Slomowitz says she landed a federal contract that required her to keep the former contractor's 12 employees. She said the group, a mix of friends and family, had grown accustomed to a laid-back workplace atmosphere that started each day with donuts for the employees.

As Ms. Slomowitz laid out her more structured expectations at an early staff meeting, one employee challenged her directly.

"She said, 'I don't answer to you. The customer thinks I'm great!'" Following a private meeting afterward, the employee was gone. That was her only firing, Ms. Slomowitz said, but two years later only one of the original 12 remained.

There's a lesson in that for us all, she said.

When a new owner takes the reins of your company, "The smart thing is just to align yourself with what's going on and if it becomes unpalatable, then you need to be planning for your next job.

"Changes like this are a reality in today's world and you really need to be prepared for that day because it's very likely it's going to happen."

Steve Twedt: [stwedt@post-gazette.com](mailto:stwedt@post-gazette.com) or 412-263-1963.