

Amy Dorn Kopelan



## “I Didn’t See It Coming” Warning signs that you might lose your job

**Z**inc may be bad for the eyes, reports eye researcher Imre Lengyel, PhD. Previous studies have shown that high doses of zinc combined with antioxidants decrease risk for vision loss in people with advanced age-related macular degeneration (AMD). *But:* A new study has found high levels of zinc in microscopic eye deposits linked with early AMD—which suggests that zinc may contribute to AMD. *Self-defense:* Talk with your physician before taking supplements containing large amounts of zinc.

Imre Lengyel, PhD, is principal investigator, Institute of Ophthalmology, University College London, England, and leader of a study of zinc levels in eye deposits, published in *Experimental Eye Research*.

**C**able-TV rates will keep rising sharply despite new competition, says consumer advocate Mark Cooper, PhD. Rates, which have nearly doubled since deregulation in the mid-1990s, are going up by 5% or more in many regions. Neither traditional cable companies nor phone companies AT&T and Verizon, which are rolling out cable services, seem interested in a price war. Instead, they are offering discounts on combined cable-TV, broadband Internet and phone service—but even these discounts are shrinking. *Alternative:* Satellite-TV rates often are a few dollars a month lower than rates for comparable cable service.

Mark Cooper, PhD, is director of research for Consumer Federation of America, Washington, DC, a consumer advocacy group. [www.consumerunion.org](http://www.consumerunion.org)

**J**et lag may trigger a relapse in mental illness, warns Alfred Lewy, MD, PhD. One study found that people whose psychiatric conditions, such as recurrent depression and bipolar disorder, had been under control were more likely to have relapses after they crossed several time zones. Jet lag does not cause psychiatric disorders—it upsets travelers’ body clocks, leaving their circadian rhythms out of sync with the time zone where they arrive. The resulting sleep deprivation may be what triggers a recurrence in some people.

Alfred Lewy, MD, PhD, is senior vice-chairman, department of psychiatry, Oregon Health & Science University, Portland, where he also is Richard H. Phillips Professor of Biological Psychiatry and professor of ophthalmology and physiology/pharmacology.

**E**ven the most secure-seeming job is never completely safe. Changes in a company’s direction...petty office politics...a strained relationship with one’s boss...or any of a host of other factors can cost even the most competent worker his/her job.

Amy Dorn Kopelan lost her position as head of morning programming at ABC in 1995, when Capital Cities Communications acquired the network. She had thought her job was safe because of the high ratings of the morning programs. She failed to consider that Capital Cities already had a skilled morning programmer and had no need for two.

Kopelan, along with two other high-powered executives who lost their jobs, decided to write a book on warning signs of workplace trouble. Here are six career-threatening events and what to do about them...

**1 Your company merges or is acquired.** Top-performing employees often assume they will survive the layoffs that follow a merger or acquisition, but an entire division might be eliminated, taking the stars out the door along with everyone else...or the acquiring company might already have someone in your role. Do not feel completely secure even if your boss “guarantees” you that your job is safe—in the new company, your boss might not have the power to make the final decision.

**What to do:** Consider how your skills and talents could be applied elsewhere in your organization, and discuss this with executives in those divisions. This increases your odds of finding a safe haven should your current division or

position be eliminated. Also prepare an exit strategy (see box, next page).

**2 Your boss loses power.** If your boss falls out of favor with the company’s top brass, his career is not the only one at risk—yours could be threatened as well. Your whole department might be viewed negatively, stalling the careers of all assigned to it...your boss’s favorable opinion of you will carry little weight, making it harder for you to advance...and your boss’s fall from grace could mean a new boss will soon take over, which can create its own problems (see next page).

Signs a boss is losing power...

*His demands become uncharacteristically unrealistic* as the pressure to produce forces him to ask the impossible of underlings.

*A consultant is brought in* to study your department.

*The departmental budget is slashed.*

*Your boss suddenly has trouble* getting access to top executives.

**What to do:** The safest strategy is to attempt to transfer to a different department with a more highly regarded leader. The more aggressive strategy is to put yourself forward for your boss’s job. You could talk to a division ▶

*Bottom Line/Personal* interviewed Amy Dorn Kopelan, president of the conference management company Bedlam Entertainment, Inc., New York City, and coauthor of *I Didn’t See It Coming: The Only Book You’ll Ever Need to Avoid Being Blindsided in Business* (Wiley). [www.ididntseeitcomingthebook.com](http://www.ididntseeitcomingthebook.com)

Her 20-year career at ABC included nine years as programming manager for *Good Morning America*.





▶▶ head you know or someone you have befriended in human resources to decide how best to go about this. Attempt it only if you have specific ideas for improving the department and a track record that suggests that such a promotion is merited.

**3 You get a new boss.** It is not enough to show your new boss that you are intelligent and hardworking. To ensure that your career remains on course, you also must match your style to that of your boss. Does he like to receive daily E-mails from people who report to him or just the occasional verbal update? Does he encourage an informal atmosphere or a buttoned-down workplace? Does he like hard-driving go-getters or easygoing team players?

**What to do:** New bosses often form lasting opinions of their employees within minutes of meeting them, so it is best to get the answers to these questions before the boss walks through the door. As soon as you learn your new boss's name, start tracking down employees, clients and colleagues from his previous positions who can fill you in. Be aware that word might get back to the new boss, so frame your queries in a very positive way.

**Example:** "I'm really excited about working with John and want to make a good impression. What can you tell me about him?"

**4 A coach is brought in.** If your employer hires a coach to help you improve your communications

or conflict-resolution skills, the appropriate response is to fear for your job. These coaches typically are hired to spend time with executives whom companies intend to fire. A report from an outside coach stating that an executive was unwilling or unable to address his serious communication problems will make it more difficult for this executive to sue the company for wrongful termination later.

**What to do:** Listen to the coach, and implement his advice even if you consider it silly or unnecessary. Your company might have hired this coach to push you out the door, but if you show improvement and maintain a positive attitude, management might let you keep your job.

**Exception:** Consider it a very positive sign if a coach is hired to help you with your marketing skills. Marketing skills coaches generally are hired when companies think an executive has excellent ideas but needs to learn how to present them better. (If you are not sure whether a coach hired to work with you is a positive or negative omen, find out which department is paying the coach's bill. Your career could be in danger if it is the human resources department.)

**5 You remind your boss of someone he is/was fond of.** It can seem like a huge career boost when a boss takes a liking to you based on a perceived similarity with someone else, such as a son or daughter, spouse, protégé or even himself at your age.

In the long run, however, this is more likely to harm your career than help it. Your colleagues could come to resent your seemingly undeserved special treatment, making it difficult for you to work with them. Or your boss could start to base his evaluations of you on the abilities and actions of someone else, taking your future out of your control and possibly hindering your career.

**What to do:** Consider whether there is something in particular about your behavior or appearance that triggers the association with this other individual. Take steps to alter this similarity. **Example:** If your boss treats you like a son and you find yourself being

deferential toward him, reposition yourself. Say something like, "I've been thinking about what we discussed last week, and I have a very different approach." Also...

**Establish boundaries** if the boss seems to be trying to get too close. If you are asked to join the boss for drinks or dinner more often than your colleagues, thank him for the invitation but say that you have previous plans.

**Keep your colleagues on your side** by standing up for their interests with the boss.

**6 You are promoted ahead of your peers.** Being promoted in your department bodes very well for your future—but if mishandled, it could derail your career. Some of your colleagues will resent you for getting the promotion that they had hoped for. Others might have trouble treating a former equal as the boss. If you cannot convince the entire team to treat you with respect, you lose effectiveness as a manager and your career could stall.

**What to do:** Do not celebrate your promotion in front of your colleagues. This will only deepen any animosities. Also...

**Meet with each member of your new team** one-on-one, and reassure each individual that you respect his talents.

**Let team members take the glory** when your team has success. You should claim credit primarily for leading your troops.

**If any member of your group cannot adjust** to your new role, try to find the person another position elsewhere in the company.

**MORE from Amy Dorn Kopelan**

## Exit Strategy

It is important to prepare an "exit strategy" if you think your job might be on the line. Network with others in your industry...update your résumé...contact headhunters...and try to quickly acquire any important skills that you lack. This way, you're all set to look for a job if you need to—and you might even land a position before you are let go.

## Last-Minute Gifts?

Give a gift subscription to  
**Bottom Line/Personal**



For details and a special offer...

**BottomLineSecrets.com/gift**  
or call **800-753-8096**