

The Mets can't even manage a classy firing, and they're not alone

BY JO PIAZZA

Tacky, classless, cowardly. Those are the words being used to describe how the Mets fired manager Willie Randolph in the wee hours of Monday. It was no surprise he was let go, but what has Mets fans and other New Yorkers outraged is the way the organization chose to give him the ax — on a road trip, 3,000 miles from home, after midnight. Forget why the guy got sacked, his ill treatment was just poor sportsmanship.

"Some may argue in the Willie Randolph case that ... the writing was on the wall. Having said that, why call him [so late]? ... It seems a little unreasonable to me under any circumstances," says termination expert Diane Pfadenhauer, whose company, Employment Practices Advisors, is hired to "trim the fat" for other companies in the New York area.

Firing is ugly and messy no matter how you slice it. Whether you're a boldface name or an average Joe, it's a shaming experience, especially when done poorly.

Annabelle Gurwitch wrote the book "Fired!" after she was axed from Woody Allen's play "Writer's Block" in 2003.

Gurwitch wrote that Allen told her on-stage, "You look retarded" and had the theater manager call her on her day off and tell her not to come back — ever.

Getting fired in a tacky way, she says, "always stays with you. ... You learn that everyone is replaceable."

Gurwitch advises Randolph to just move on and "forget the Mets."

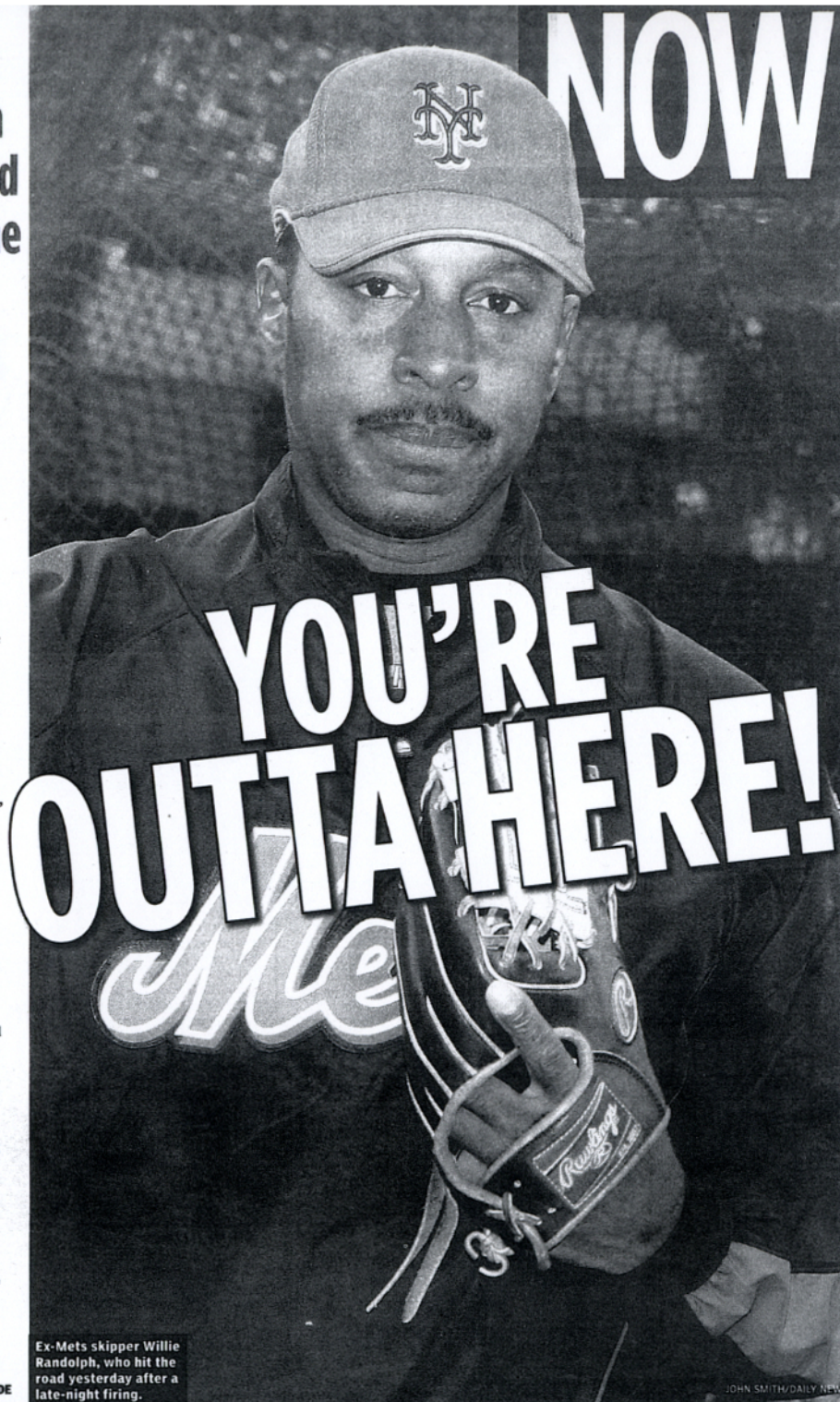
Sure, Randolph will find something new, but it doesn't take the sting out of the Mets' nasty sneak attack.

Tasteless firings are more common than you'd think.

Last week, longtime HarperCollins CEO Jane Friedman was pushed out. The kick in the pants was that news of her ouster was leaked from within company ranks to the media Web site Gawker before Friedman even sat down with her boss to discuss the transition.

By the time she had that talk, the Internet and media world were abuzz with the story.

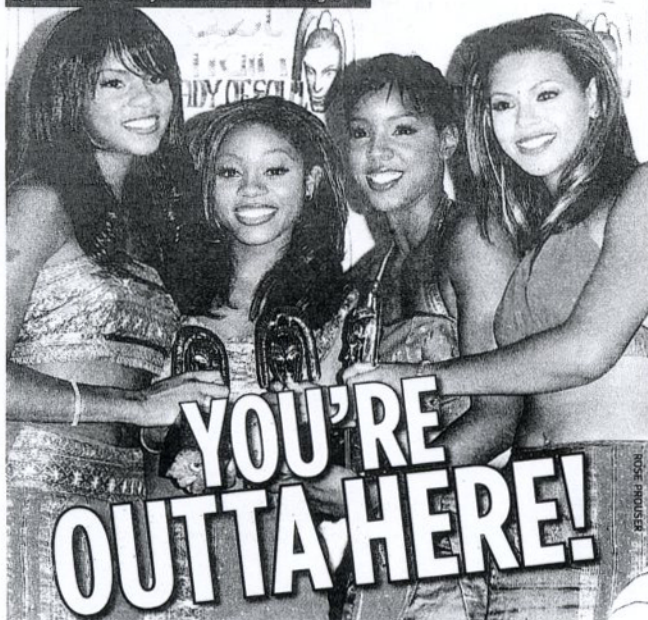
CONTINUED INSIDE



Ex-Mets skipper Willie Randolph, who hit the road yesterday after a late-night firing.

JOHN SMITH/DAILY NEWS

LeToya Lockett (l.), LaTavia Robertson (second from l.): fired from *Destiny's Child* without knowing it



CONTINUED FROM THE COVER

Ron Corning, former co-anchor on WNYW/Ch. 5's "Good Day New York," found out when he returned from a week's vacation that he'd been fired.

COVER STORY

"In either case [his or Randolph's], it's an act of cowardice when managers can't act in good faith and do what's right," Corning said. "You initially think it's you. You take it personally. Then you realize you're part of a not-so-exclusive club of people."

"Caspian," an intern at FHM magazine, recalls the carnage — and confusion — of a day in late December 2006 when the print version of the lad mag was shut down.

"It was right before Christmas, and everyone on the print side was called into the meeting," says Caspian. "I mean everyone — even the interns, who never are allowed into anything. We thought it was about the holiday party or bonuses, but realized it was going

to be bad news when the higher-ups from our U.K. headquarters walked in. They fired everyone. You could literally hear the gasps."

Across the hall, the seven writers for FHM's Web site were called into a meeting at the same time — and told they were going to keep their jobs. They spent the rest of the day avoiding vicious glares from the print-side employees, who were cleaning out their desks. Merry Christmas!

Insensitive firings happen every day, says employment attorney Kevin Mintzer of the New York employment law firm Vladeck, Waldman, Elias & Engelhard, and while they may be wrong, that doesn't mean they're illegal.

"People are fired all the time in very insensitive and acrimonious ways. It's common these days for people, after 15 to 25 years at a place, to be escorted out of a building and summarily dismissed for not

SO YOU'VE BEEN FIRED. NOW WHAT?

A routine day on the job turns traumatic after your boss suddenly hauls you into his office and kicks you to the curb. What's the next step when you're unexpectedly axed? "Don't panic," says Alison Doyle, employment expert on *About.com*'s job-searching guide. "Take a deep breath, and just take it step by step."

1 GET BENEFITS IN ORDER. "The most important thing you can do is talk to your human resources department or your manager," says Doyle. Ask about your assets. Is there severance pay? What happens to health insurance? Does the company carry your 401K for a certain period? Do you have vacation time or sick days that you can get paid for? "Find out what happens to everything you have as an employee," Doyle says.

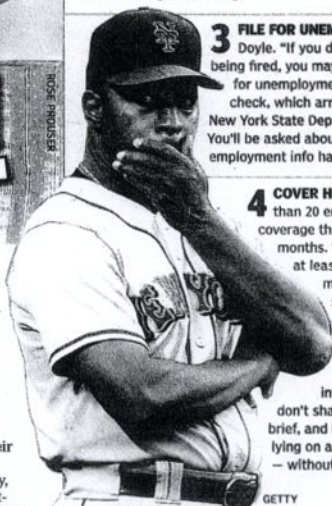
2 KNOW YOUR RIGHTS. Are you covered by an individual contract, union or collective bargaining agreement? "Union workers have a huge wealth of rights available," says Robert Fox, deputy director of Working America, a community affiliate of the AFL-CIO. Think about whether you were wrongfully dismissed due to age, disability, pregnancy or race. Also consider hiring an employment lawyer to discuss legal options, or use Working America's free "Ask a Lawyer" feature at www.workingamerica.org.

3 FILE FOR UNEMPLOYMENT. "Get that claim going!" says Doyle. "If you don't think that you did anything to warrant being fired, you may well be entitled." The sooner you apply for unemployment benefits, the sooner you get that first check, which arrives two to three weeks later. Apply at the New York State Department of Labor at www.labor.state.ny.us. You'll be asked about dates and addresses from your job, so have employment info handy.

4 COVER HEALTH INSURANCE. Companies with more than 20 employees must legally offer health insurance coverage through COBRA to terminated employees for 18 months. "You'll probably have to pay for it yourself, but at least it's something," says Doyle. Some employers may cover it for a limited time as part of a severance package.

5 MOVE ON. On the job hunt, keep your firing out of your cover letter and résumé, and don't bring it up unless an interviewer specifically asks. "Be honest, but don't share all the gory details," says Doyle. "Keep it brief, and keep it moving." Do tell the truth, because lying on a job application is grounds for future firing — without unemployment benefits.

Nicole Lyn Pesce



GETTY

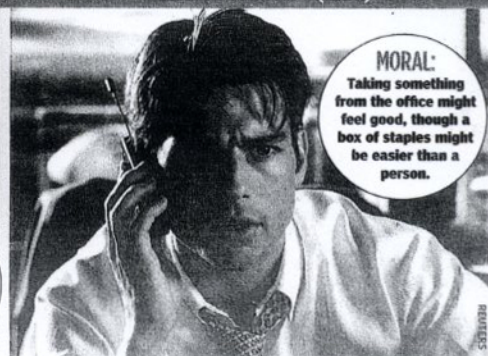
doing anything wrong, but just because the employer has decided to let the person go," Mintzer says. "It can be heartless and extremely insensitive and compound someone's emotional hurt from being fired, but it's not illegal, and employers do it routinely."

But Pfadenhauer, who lays people off

(among other things) for a living, explains that some companies don't mean to be so cruel.

"A lot of people feel really badly about firing people," she says, adding that insensitive acts may stem from legal precautions. "A lot of it is avoiding liability or any kind of statement that

"JERRY MAGUIRE" (1996)



MORAL:
Taking something from the office might feel good, though a box of staples might be easier than a person.

When hotshot sports agent Jerry (Tom Cruise) is fired by his protégé (Jay Mohr) at an L.A. restaurant, he dramatically, and loudly, exits the office, taking a secretary (Renee Zellweger) and a fish with him.

"DREAMGIRLS" (2006)



MORAL:
If you can belt out a great tune as you're leaving, you'll likely be remembered.

Effie White (Jennifer Hudson) gets pushed to the background of the Detroit girl group she co-founded after her lover and manager, Curtis (Jamie Foxx), falls for diva-beauty Deena (Beyoncé). Effie, left pregnant and alone, defiantly sings "And I Am Telling You I'm Not Going."

Joe Neumaier

LIGHTS! CAMERA! AX 'EM!

In the movies, getting fired can be a major plot point or a minor joke; can reinvigorate a character or knock 'em down; kick-start a plot or be the final humiliation. And just as with great movie quitting moments (Albert Brooks in "Lost in America," Bill Murray in "Stripes"), memorable film firings can contain a lesson for the real world. Here are five to remember: