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Go in a Crunk-Car if you wish -- just go!

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The time has come.

The time is now.

Just go. Go. GO!

I don't care how.

--"Marvin K. Mooney, Will You Please Go Now!" Dr. Seuss

In most cases, when a board of directors decides it no longer wishes the pleasure of a chief executive's company, the ensuing drama is more tightly scripted than any Broadway play.

In fact the script was written when the executive was first hired, in the employment contract, so that all that is needed is a tweaking of a stage direction or two. The executive says he's leaving to pursue other opportunities or spend more time with his family. The company thanks him for his years of service and wishes him luck in his future endeavors. Everyone pretends to like, or at least tolerate, one another.

But sometimes an executive or the directors decide they don't like the lines they've been given. They want more lines, different lines, better lines. They threaten to make it an improvisational play -- or stop the production entirely.

Then the fun begins.

We've had two rather prominent illustrations this week of just what happens when the script gets tossed: the University of Washington's increasingly messy and public problem with football coach Rick Neuheisel, and the departure of the three top executives from mortgage financier Freddie Mac.

Instances like those are notable not just because of their entertainment value but because they're rare.

In most cases of a CEO's separation, there's not a lot to discuss. "The price of what it takes to get rid of that CEO is tightly laid out in the contract," says Tim Chrisman, founding principal of the Los Angeles executive search firm Chrisman & Co.

Both sides have lots of motivation not to deviate from that script. They can't avoid the inevitable speculation in the industry, and in the media if the company is large enough, but they can see to it that nothing fuels that speculation beyond a few days. The company doesn't want its image tarnished any more than necessary. The CEO might like to find another job some day.

For that reason, says Steve Mader, chief executive of search firm Christian & Timbers, "Usually there's an agreement on what's going to be said, from the press release to a total non-disparagement agreement."

Usually. But there's the occasional case in which the CEO suggests he won't go quietly. He'd like the board to make it more worth his while to leave. Or he doesn't think the board has lived up to the severance terms of his employment contract, or followed proper procedure in dismissing him. Or the board has decided the firing is "for cause" and it's off the hook for what it's contractually obligated to pay.

Then, Mader says, it becomes a contest of figuring out "how much noise can anyone tolerate." And if one side decides a lot of noise can be tolerated in the interest of its case, the whole mess sometimes spills out into the public.

There may be a lot more spilling in the months to come. Chrisman says in this post-Enron, post-Sarbanes-Oxley environment, corporate directors are feeling increasingly sensitive to the bad publicity generated by lavish payouts to departed CEOs. Sometimes it's more than just bad publicity they're worried about. They're also wary of shareholder lawsuits.

Of course an ex-CEO who doesn't get what he believes is coming to him may sue too. But as Chrisman notes, directors may figure they'd rather get sued by a mad ex-CEO than by a lot of mad shareholders.

"Even contracts that are hard and fast are being investigated," he says. "You will see things change dramatically."

In Theodore Geisel's epic poem, Marvin K. Mooney is advised: "You can go on stilts. You can go by fish. You can go in a Crunk-Car if you wish."

We may not know exactly what a Crunk-Car is. The board of directors may not be sure what a Crunk-Car is, even though it may have promised the CEO use of one as part of his employment contract, and its continued use after his termination.

But if Chrisman's prediction is correct, CEOs had better not presume that the boards that are firing them will automatically carry through on their promise of a Crunk-Car. And those boards had better not presume that CEOs, once promised a Crunk-Car, will go quietly when they're denied the use of one.

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