



You're Going Where? Protecting Key Information from Departing Employees

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It is a quiet Friday afternoon for you at Wernham Hogg Paper Company. As you gaze out the window and contemplate your plans for the weekend, you are suddenly jolted back into reality when your company's best salesperson, Peter Gibbons, enters the office to tell you that he is resigning his employment, effective immediately. Your jaw drops to the floor when he tells you that he is moving to Dunder Mifflin Paper Company, Wernham Hogg's biggest competitor.

Peter gave you no inkling that he was dissatisfied in any way. His numbers have been consistently great because he understands Wernham Hogg's products, he builds great relationships with customers and he is very good at sticking to the company's short-and long-term business plans.

Now, he is going to take his knowledge of Wernham Hogg's operations, along with his considerable sway with its biggest customers, to a competitor so that he can use that information against your employer. What should you be doing now to prepare yourself for this possibility down the road? And what do you do when immediately confronted with the resignation of a key employee?

Here are some best practices for when an employee defection crisis hits:

- Have agreements in place
- Think through key information, take steps to protect it
- Make it clear: employees can't use computers on behalf of competitors
- Pay for employee's cell phones
- Preserve the hard drive
- Examine evidence that is available to you

Dealing with departing employees is a three-stage process. There is the planning stage beforehand, then there is the preserving and probing after the resignation. Handle all three stages well and you can leave Peter Gibbons taking out his frustrations on a printer in an open field instead of taking your company's customers.

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