Secrets your company doesn't want you to know
A sneak-peek behind the curtain on corporate tactics and attitudes when dealing with employees

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NEW YORK (CNNMoney.com) -- It can be gratifying to be right, except when being right means someone has confirmed your worst fears.

That's what former human resource executive Cynthia Shapiro will do for some readers of her book, "Corporate Confidential: 50 Secrets Your Company Doesn't Want You To Know."

Learning these secrets may shock some employees into recognizing their cluelessness about how their actions are really perceived by managers.

For the rest of us, we might just feel better about how relatively well our employers and colleagues have treated us ... although we might gain some insight as to why.

Not every company necessarily harbors all 50 secrets that Shapiro writes about. But it's a fair bet they harbor many, she said.

Her advice: view your actions through the eyes of your company, which is like a fearful giant that won't hesitate to swat you down if you tweak its fears.

Yes, Virginia, there is a blacklist

The typical rationale for layoffs is the need to reorganize and cut costs.

Pish-posh.

Sometimes those reasons are genuine. But Shapiro has seen companies push select employees out of their jobs or layoff an entire department just to get rid of one or two people without incurring liability.

And those select employees may never know they made a manager's blacklist.

One easy way to get on it is to insult the boss or be overly negative about the company on email, in a meeting, or at the water cooler.
Being a top performer may provide some protection. But if you and your boss don't get along and he has to get rid of two people, he's likely to go for the people who make his day difficult, Shapiro said.

Being among the most highly compensated employees in your office will only give him added incentive.

Treat difficult bosses and colleagues as you would if you were a small business owner dealing with annoying clients: professionally at all times, she said. Otherwise, you'll lose the account.

You're also at greater risk of a layoff if you've:

- First announced that you're pregnant or need medical leave to someone other than your boss. If she hears about it from someone other than you, she could lay you off and claim she had no idea about your personal situation.
- Taken a medical leave or filed for worker's compensation recently.
- Filed a complaint against the company or your boss.

There's also a golden list

There are some employees who can do no wrong, or if they do, they're far more likely to be given some slack.

They're the employees who are perceived as trustworthy, even if they're not the top performers.

"Anyone can learn skills. Companies are looking for something more. They are looking for those who appear to value everything the company values," Shapiro writes.

These are also the folks who actually do what the boss wants, and not just what they think should be done, regardless of the boss's wishes.

Work-life balance? Don't get spun.

Ignore what the company says about itself to employees or to the press. Instead, Shapiro said, "look at what they value by what they do."

We Love Our Employees, Inc. may proclaim work-life balance is a value it holds near and dear. But which employees get rewarded and which don't?

If it's the midnight-oil burners who get the promotions and plum projects while the work-life balancers are the first to get pink slips, you can bet your exercising flex time, job-sharing or telecommuting privileges might very well limit your career growth at the company.

Parents especially are at risk of being perceived as distracted. "From nine-to-five your work life has to at least appear to come first – even if it doesn't," Shapiro writes.

HR is never your friend

Shapiro's years as a human-resource executive before becoming an employee advisor made one thing abundantly clear:

"HR is not there to help employees anymore. HR is there to support management," Shapiro said.

Always go to your boss first with any concerns or conflicts. Going to HR makes you look weak – which isn't a plus when it comes to getting promoted.

"Only go to HR after you've tried and documented several attempts to speak with your boss about a serious issue," she writes. By serious, she means an issue that, if not resolved, would cause you to leave the company.
And definitely don't shoot the breeze with HR about your medical concerns, family stresses or that drunken night in Vegas.

Anything you say can and will be used against you if need be -- no matter how sympathetic and helpful the person you talk to may seem.

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