

I WAS FIRED at the pinnacle of my career, on my 39th birthday. And in the year that followed, I learned that there are many psychological phases of being “let go.”

For me, the bad news came soon after I had signed the dream contract of any television journalist’s career. I had been working as a reporter or anchor for almost 20 years, many of which were spent at CBS News or the local affiliate. I had married and borne two children as I rose through the ranks with CBS. It was the frame around which I built my family, my work, my life and my identity.

By 38, I had a shiny new contract as the anchor of the Sunday evening broadcast; a correspondent spot on *60 Minutes Wednesday*; and the possibility of cohosting the *CBS Evening News*. It was great fun, and a huge steroid injection to the ego. My two girls were especially proud. We had been on this journey together, with mommy flying all over the country to report on news stories for a decade.

Carlie came with me to a shoot on *Sesame Street*. Emilie liked to hide under the desk as I anchored the *Sunday Evening News*. They felt at home at CBS.

After all those years of hard work and dedication, it all ended in a flash. With Dan Rather’s departure came the elimination of the managers above him—the very same managers who hired me.

Suddenly I went from being the network’s It Girl to “What’s her name?” I was about to turn 40, sitting alone at my desk, land line silent, cellphone silent, inbox empty. It happened overnight. I knew it was over; it was just a matter of how and when it would all go down.

It wasn’t long afterward that I was negotiating my very public and very painful exit from CBS. I was devastated. I hated leaving. I loved the job, but mostly I loved the people there.

My untimely departure led to some strange reactive behavior. To some, I acted happy—free! But that didn’t feel right. To others, I expressed complete self-destruction, but that didn’t seem right, either. To my kids I acted like I was giving them a gift. Somehow, I felt it was my duty to protect them from the pain I was feeling. Big mistake.

I fed them a speech explaining how great this would be for all of us and



Moving On

Anatomy of a high-end firing
By Mika Brzezinski

quickly moved on, thinking I had done the right thing as a protective mother. The next day, the school called: Eight-year-old Carlie was upset, and the teacher asked if I could come in. Could I come in? Of course, this was the new me!

I found Carlie outside her classroom in the fetal position, her teacher crouched over with her hand on Carlie’s shoulder. My child was clearly upset; the teacher looked uncomfortable and said in a low voice, “Carlie tells me you’re leaving your job, and she’s very upset.” I turned to Carlie and said, “That’s a good thing, right? It’s a good thing because we’ll get time together. No more rushing. No more missing your events. No more job!” She pulled her head up, and, with two big blue eyes pooling with tears, said, “But Mommy, you love it so much! I don’t want you to have to leave your job.”

That moment was the first time I truly cried about what had happened to me, to us. I realized it would

be OK to mourn together, to be angry together, to be discouraged together, and to be honest with each other. Carlie’s sheer honesty and concern for me broke my heart. From that moment on, I sugarcoated nothing. When I was nervous about an interview, I told them. When I botched an interview, I told them. When someone wouldn’t even bother to meet with me, I told them. They needed to be part of the process, whether I was up or down. It was a humbling yet enriching experience for all of us.

A fundamental lesson of being fired: There’s no need to lie about it. People will know what you’re saying is a cover-up for how you really feel—embarrassed, discouraged, and afraid. It’s best to simply be true to those feelings and work from them. Kids are a great place to start with that. They, too, will face challenges in life, and job loss is an opportunity to show them what you are made of.

Mika Brzezinski, cohost of MSNBC’s weekday morning program, Morning Joe, and The Joe Scarborough Show on ABC Radio, will continue to share life lessons in future columns, and, in 2010, will release a book about her life and her career journey.