



HOW TO GET FIRED

A wryly observational collection of interlinking short stories about work: how to get it, lose it and avoid it.

'An utterly absorbing experience that reminded me of Elizabeth Strout's wonderful Olive Kitteridge. I kept catching my breath as I came across familiar detail presented with a fresh and loving eye. This is simply a must read.' — Fiona Kidman



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Evana Belich was born in Wellington and now lives in Auckland where she has worked as a trade union official, a mediator and an employment relations adviser. She has degrees in law, dispute resolution and a Master's in creative writing from the IIML.

She won the Fish Short Story Prize in 2013, was shortlisted for the Bridport Prize in 2016 and came second in the Sargeson Prize in 2020.

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NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

We spend so much of our time working, why isn't working life more closely represented in fiction? As an employment adviser, mediator and union worker I've had the privilege of hearing many stories of the workplace. None of these stories appear in this book. I have been scrupulously careful to work solely from my imagination except when it came to certain emotional truths – the effects of continuous restructuring, the rift between personal values and workplace rules, the knowledge that you may soon lose your job, the sympathy a manager may feel for a union representative.

Another source of inspiration was the unexpected ways in which our paths cross and sometimes re-cross.

One day, I was trying to explain my ideas for structuring this book to a friend as we chatted about our writing in a university café in Wellington. This particular friend had sat next to me in primary school. Before meeting her again in our writing class I had last seen her at a party in London – we were in our thirties then. Now, in our sixties, we found ourselves part of the same creative-writing class.

As I was trying to find words for how I was going to structure my book of stories, another classmate came up to the two of us and said to my friend – after the usual introductions and small talk – 'years ago, I used to live in the house across the street from where you live in now.'

LIFE DEMONSTRATING ART DEMONSTRATING LIFE IN REAL TIME.

Is this just a small country thing? We New Zealanders all have stories about unexpected connection: waiting in a queue for a train in rural Turkey only to find we are standing behind our next-door neighbours from Johnsonville. Or feeling exasperated when we're asked by someone from a larger country if, seeing as we are from New Zealand do we happen to know their good friend [insert name of another New Zealander]? And then realising that, yes, in fact we do know them, damn it.

BOOK CLUB QUESTIONS

1. As soon as I'd decided on the structure I had wonderful fun choosing the person or situation I would write about next. I challenged an early reader to guess who or what the next link between stories would be and was a little deflated when she guessed correctly. Can you?
2. What are your own experiences of unexpected connections between people?
3. Most of these stories are set in New Zealand – does this enhance your enjoyment of the work? Does it add to the theme of connection? Does it make any difference when the stories are set in America?
4. How is the subject of employment expressed in each story? How pertinent is this topic to our current lives? How many other books of fiction do you know that explore this subject in depth?
5. Fiona Kidman wrote of these stories, 'I kept catching my breath as I came across familiar detail presented with a fresh and loving eye' – what moments of recognition did you have?
6. The stories explore many different relationships, often with the characters on the verge of change in their personal lives. Do you think change is characteristic of our times? Is it inevitable, is it generally for the better?
7. Do any of the changes in the book remind you of changes in your own lives?
8. Do you have strong relationships with your workmates? Are these relationships different from your other friendships? Who do you talk to most in the course of an ordinary working day – your family or your workmates?