

JANUARY 14, 2010, 1:35 PM ET

“Up In The Air” Dragged Back Down To Earth By Start-Up

We skim hundreds of press releases that include tie-ins to current events and pop culture, entries with headlines like “Aviation Expert Available To Discuss Flight 27 Fire” and “What Does Avatar Mean For Cloud Computing?” (These are fictional but plausible examples.) Yesterday’s effort from venture-backed job search and outplacement company RiseSmart Inc. is way better than most, partly because of its intelligent critique of [“Up In The Air.”](#)

Since we like business movies (yet never got around to seeing the Renee Zellweger-fires-people epic “New In Town”) we’re glad that RiseSmart got into the discussion with its missive, entitled [“RiseSmart CEO Sanjay Sathe Exposes Five HR Myths in ‘Up in the Air’”](#).

(Note: For some reason this movie brings out violations of spoiler etiquette - with the relatively dissimilar [George Will](#) and [Rex Reed](#) both giving away far too much. So, SPOILER ALERT!!! We won’t disclose the ending but will address a plot point or two, so you may wish to click the back button, or better yet, the previous post conveniently located on the top right of your screen.)



Associated Press

RiseSmart, which is backed by \$9 million in funding from Norwest Venture Partners and Storm Ventures, says in its press release that ‘Up in the Air’ “attempts to ground itself in reality by featuring interviews with real people who’ve lost their jobs” but “that’s about the only thing the movie gets right in its portrayal of corporate layoffs and the human resources function.”

For example, one of the five myths, the company says, is that employees get no help beyond a “packet” of “useless information” at the time of a layoff. In contrast, RiseSmart points to a survey that found most employers use outplacement firms to help workers get new jobs. RiseSmart also disputes the notion that “HR professionals thrive by being emotionally detached.”

Best of all is RiseSmart’s debunking of the theory that “laid-off workers can be mollified with generic pep talks.” The company invokes Clooney’s line that “anyone who ever built an empire or changed the world sat where you are sitting, and it’s because they sat there that they were able to do it.”

RiseSmart says “the thought that this kind of condescending pep talk would ‘work’ on people is insulting to those who have actually had to go through this experience.” Right on. The downsizing victims in the movie are too easily impressed - the cynical J.K. Simmons character is rapidly persuaded about the merits of opening a restaurant during the credit crunch, and there’s a queasy suggestion that layoffs are okay because you get to spend more time with your family.

For its part, RiseSmart notes that Clooney’s character “skulks out of offices and on to the next firing,” adding that the real-life work of transition consultants is often uplifting and inspiring. “Maybe that can be the story told in ‘Up in the Air 2.’”

([Click here](#) for a RiseSmart blog post on the movie.)

Copyright 2008 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. Distribution and use of this material are governed by our [Subscriber Agreement](#) and by copyright law. For non-personal use or to order multiple copies, please contact Dow Jones Reprints at 1-800-843-0008 or visit www.djreprints.com