

## Salesman fired the day his wife died sues ex-boss

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(Handout)

Lou Bell (left) with his wife Michelle. Bell, 71, says he was placed on an 'indefinite leave of absence' after 40 years on the job with Stan Deutsch Associates on April 2, the day his wife died.

Hit the bricks! And sorry about your wife.

A Queens lighting company booted a loyal 40-year employee on the same day his wife died, the axed worker says.

Two days later, Lou Bell's boss emailed him to offer her condolences — and to tell him she was turning off his company cell phone.

"I worked so hard for this company all these years and helped them to the best of my ability. I'm a loyal guy," Bell, 71, told the Daily News.

"It was very disheartening."

Now, Bell is suing his former bosses at Stan Deutsch Associates for age discrimination.

His lawyer, son Jonathan Bell, said what happened to his father was "awful."

"He'd had two constants in his life, his wife and his work, and he basically lost them both on the same day."

Bell married his wife, Michelle in 1973, the same year he went to work for Deutsch after being lured there from another lighting company.

The salesman excelled at his job and was devoted to it, his son said.

"He wasn't at my basketball games or school events. He was working to support his family," the younger Bell said. When people asked him what he would do in his spare time, he would say, "My hobby is lighting."

He worked with several big clients, including the School Construction Authority, but started having health problems in June 2012.

When he was hospitalized with neurological ailments, boss Melissa Deutsch accused him of trying to run some kind of scam.

"She called me a liar," Bell said.

But the employee continued working with his clients. Earlier this year, Bell kept trying to work while his wife was in the hospital with breast cancer.

He said he was called into work on April 2 for a mandatory meeting with Deutsch, where he was told he was being placed on an "indefinite leave of absence" and had to give up his clients.

He was also told he was losing his health insurance and had to go on COBRA — coverage generally reserved for former employees, retirees, former spouses and dependent children.

Bell said he “wasn’t surprised” because he already had the sense that he was being forced out to make room for younger workers, but it was “very sad.”

That night, Michelle died. She was 71.

“My wife was the love of my life,” Bell said.

The suit charges he was discriminated against because of his age and health issues.

Deutsch declined comment.

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