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KEEPING YOUR JOB IN A COMPETITIVE ECONOMY



As millions of displaced workers are coming to terms with the so-called jobless recovery, millions more are wondering how secure their jobs are. Here are several practical guidelines for keeping your job in this difficult employment environment.

START NEW PROJECTS...A LOT OF NEW PROJECTS

When employers downsize, they inevitably have to reshuffle responsibilities and project assignments. Most employers try to keep this turbulence to a minimum by keeping the employees who are most intimately involved in important projects. If you feel that your company may be forced to let some employees go, ask to join important and/or unpopular committees and task forces. To ensure that you are not let go as soon as an important assignment ends, try to stagger the start and end dates of your assignments, so that there is never a "good time" to let you go.

DON'T MESS WITH THE SCHEDULE

The most visible way to demonstrate that you don't care about your job is to not show up or to show up late. Make a point of being the first person to show up each morning. Schedule doctor's appointments outside of work hours and schedule vacations during slow times. If you must take a day off, ask for the time off well in advance of that day and make arrangements to prepare for your absence.

IMPROVE COMPANY MORALE

Uncertainty about the future can poison the morale of a workplace. Low morale usually means low productivity, which can lead to more layoffs. More importantly, as employers struggle to motivate their dwindling workforces, employees who inspire and entertain their coworkers have never been more valuable. Identify small ways to improve morale throughout the day. Celebrate small victories, resolve annoying conflicts, and encourage people at every chance. Let your boss know that you are an ally in the continual struggle to keep employees happy, healthy, and motivated.

CUT COSTS IN YOUR DEPARTMENT

Layoffs are always a last resort. If there is any other way to cut costs, management will likely jump at the opportunity. Preempt discussions of layoffs by performing an informal audit of your department and suggesting several cost-cutting measures to your boss. For instance, you could suggest moving to a paperless memo system as a way to reduce paper expenses and offer to renegotiate deals with key suppliers.

MOVE TO A SAFER DEPARTMENT

Some departments fare better than others during recessions. If you are in the experimental research division of a company that is facing drastic budget cuts, you may be better off switching to the core product division before the layoffs begin.

BE A BETTER FRIEND

No boss wants to deliver the news that the most popular person in the company has been let go. Most employers will fire isolated or unpopular employees before those who are outgoing and friendly. To make yourself less fireable, focus on being a good listener and a good friend to all of your coworkers. Warning: make sure you are genuine because if your niceness comes off as calculating, it will likely have the opposite effect.

TAKE ON MORE RESPONSIBILITIES

If layoffs are inevitable, there will be two groups of people: those who are let go and those who take on the additional responsibilities of those who are terminated. To prove to your employer that you belong in the group that stays, offer to take on some responsibilities that are usually reserved for other workers. For instance, if you are in a sales position, you may let your boss know that you have always had an interest in marketing and would love the opportunity to work on some marketing projects, in addition to your normal sales responsibilities.

RELAX

It is natural to panic once you hear rumors of downsizing, but playing it cool will improve your chances of keeping your job. Employers find it easier to fire panicking employees because they tend to bring down morale and productivity. Additionally, top employees rarely panic because they know less valuable employees will be fired first. By staying calm, you are sending a signal to your employer that you are in that elite class.

MASTER A UNIQUE SKILL OR TASK

In any workplace, there are those tasks that only one person knows how to do. Maybe it's fixing the printer when it gives that weird error message or knowing how to work the thermostat that seems to have a mind of its own. Locate these opportunities in your workplace and make sure you are the go-to person for as many of these odd jobs as possible.

ASK CUSTOMERS AND AFFILIATES TO SPEAK UP ON YOUR BEHALF

It's almost impossible for an employer to justify firing someone who is getting rave reviews from customers and affiliates on a regular basis. Develop a few (appropriate) scripts that you can use to compel your best customers and partners to sing your praises, such as "Would you mind telling my boss what you just told me? She loves to hear stories about satisfied customers."

