



## **CAN THIS JOB BE SAVED? TIPS TO HELP AVOID BEING DOWNSIZED**

Last week's news reported more than 60,000 US jobs lost across various sectors, more than 45,000 of those reported on Monday alone. Predictions from several economists are that we could see 2.5 million additional jobs shed before the end of 2009. While I'm not trying to be a downer, I think it's time for some straight talk about how to try to save your job and, most importantly, how not to be the next person downsized at your firm.

It's not always within your control to determine whether you are the next one affected in a company's efforts to trim costs, but there are a host of things you can do to help minimize the risk that you're the next head to get put on the chopping block. No matter what a company says publicly, there are ways to save some of the jobs or to transfer people to other jobs. The jobs that get saved are the ones held by people who seem essential to the ongoing success of the business. When firms look to cut staff, troublemakers, slackers and those who don't seem like team players are the easiest cuts to make – here are some ways to tone up your attitude and behaviors to become essential to your firm

### **Be on Time and Seriously Curtail your Personal Time**

Be at your desk and working when your boss arrives and stop scheduling personal appointments that have you away from the office during respectable work hours. Your absence from the office for kids' soccer games, doctor's appointments, charitable organizations' fundraising events, etc. really is noticed. Late arrivals, early departures, unexplained (and even lots of explained) time away from the office right now can help make you an easy cut – after all, if you're there less than full (and I mean "full" time) what will really be the loss in productivity your boss will perceive if you're gone?

While I'm normally an advocate of work-life balance, right now we're talking about how to make sure you still have the "work" part of your life to be able to balance. We're talking about perceptions and you need to think about how you are managing those perceptions about your commitment to your work. Is this really the year to take an adult ed class that means you have to cut out of the staff meetings early every week? Is the ONLY time you can see your dentist really during business hours? If you say you're "working from home" – be sure you're in touch with your colleagues so you are seen as "working" and not just "at home". These are extraordinary times and you'll need to work with your spouse, children and outside obligations to be sure you're making your commitment to keeping your job an obvious priority.

### **Step Up, Go the Extra Mile and Be an Active Participant**

When a task needs to be done at your office or for a client are you an eager volunteer or are you highly skilled in averting your gaze to pick fuzz off your sweater? The worst

words to ever utter in a recessionary down-sizing job market like this are “that’s not my job”. I once had someone who worked for me respond to my request with “I checked my contract, and ...” I could have checked her contract to see that it probably also said that she was an “at will employee”! Make this the time you actively look for ways to make yourself useful, not overtly disinterested in stepping up.

Have you read all of the materials for the meetings? Have you gone beyond the effort to be able to contribute something meaningful for the success of your firm and your colleagues? Are you hiding out in your office with the door closed hoping to be passed over by your seeming invisibility? Those who offer the bare minimum of themselves to their work will be rewarded with the minimum effort to save their jobs. Being unable to participate fully in a meeting calls yourself out as unprepared and, therefore, of questionable value to the ongoing success of the organization. Hiding in your office unwilling to engage in the firm’s struggle to survive makes you an easy to cut, faceless name on the payroll expense.

By contrast, one who is interested and actively engaged in being a contributing member of an organization thinks through issues thoroughly (beyond the simple aspect of the task which was assigned) to be able to offer additional insights, savings, ways to be of value or to take the burden off of someone else is more likely to be seen as essential to the company’s future success.

### **Think Critically, Speak with Creativity**

A wise person in times like these will not be afraid to ask for help, to raise a problem, or to suggest ways to improve. That wise person would also have thought in advance about potential solutions that benefit everyone involved and will not simply be a complainer or a critic. All companies can benefit from critical thinking – ways to improve efficiencies, trim expenses, enhance revenue. Demonstrating your thoughtfulness on issues of importance to your company displays your long term commitment to the organization and offering suggested solutions, rather than just pointing out problems is a mark of someone more likely to be a “keeper”. Someone who simply says – “I don’t know what to do with this” or “This is a problem you’re going to need to deal with” without offering an indication that she has thought about how to resolve the problem, not just dump it on someone else’s desk, is exposing herself to a slot in the next downsizing. Problem solvers are essential, problem makers and complainers are easy marks for RIF.

### **Be a Rainmaker, not a Credit Hog**

For all the call I’m making upon you to participate, step up, offer solutions, it is important that you do so in a way that isn’t constantly calling attention to yourself as a “big shot”. When I was a young lawyer in my first job, I had the good fortune to have developed a number of new clients who proved very lucrative for our firm. Unfortunately, it took me more years to learn how to be subtle about my success and not be an obnoxious crow about it at every meeting, pointing out everything I thought I

should get credit for. Do your job, be helpful to people and to your firm, look for ways to lessen the burden for others and your efforts will be recognized. Be a credit hog and, no matter how much money or success you bring to your firm, your security cannot be guaranteed. Remember, those who help create harmony and success within your organization are valued more than those who create discord.

### **Be a Collaborator and a Cheerleader for your Colleagues**

This is a time to help strengthen your team, not a time to be a back-stabber. Find ways to work with your colleagues, to seek their input on improving your efforts and to cheer their successes as much as your own. Give up the sense of competitiveness that you may have cultivated. I am urging that while you continue to give your all, you stop being a “scorekeeper” making sure you “get what you’re owed”. Use words like “our” not “my”. In times like these, making sure that you are looking out for the bigger picture and the success of the organization can help make you safer; allies are a good thing and no one likes to keep the guy who’s in it only for himself.

### **Be Honest, Be Kind, Be Trustworthy**

Hard to make this any plainer than it is. It may not be the thing that saves your job, but it will be what is said about you in a reference check and how you will feel about yourself when you look in the mirror no matter what happens.

### **Work Hard - Apprentice Yourself to Your Work and to Constant Improvement**

It’s easy to forget that this business is one long made of apprenticeship and teamwork. No matter how long you’ve been in the business, you likely are not making your living solely by yourself. You are learning from those around you, from the industry around you and you should be committed to continuing your education about how to improve your work. When one apprentices in any other business, it is seen as a way to hone one’s skills and to develop a sense of pride in one’s craft. The apprentice is usually excited to be taken on to learn from a master craftsman and the enthusiasm, commitment and dedication he displays is great – even for the smallest of tasks. That same sense of “working like you love it” – not just that you love the money - is what often makes the difference. Are you reading about your industry, learning what makes others successful, are you actively engaged in improving yourself in your work?

This era of downsizing is a time that should have each of us asking not what your company can do for you, but what you can do for your company. Those who actively work to become essential to their firm’s success will be far along on the path of security and will be vastly more capable when these troubled times are only a memory.