

Recession-proofing your job

You can protect your career from economic upheaval. But the time to act is now - before things get really tough, the pros warn. Wallace Immen and Virginia Galt canvassed the experts for moves to make to develop the right action plan

WALLACE IMMEN AND VIRGINIA GALT

00:00 EST WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 06, 2008

DO

RAISE YOUR PROFILE

It's not enough to do your job: people have to know. So make visible contributions in several areas, suggests Marc Belaiche, president of recruitment website Torontojobs.ca. Employers appreciate those willing to go beyond their regular job descriptions to help out within the company.

"The employees who shine in their employers' eyes are the ones that don't have to be asked to take on more work. Meanwhile, those who feel that they only need to do the requirements on their job description and not go above and beyond are invariably the first to go in a downsizing," he says.

And make sure you cast a broad net, adds career coach Gwen McCauley, principal of Odysseys Unlimited Inc. in Ottawa.

"Sure, your boss should know, but your boss could be a victim of downsizing as well; so you want your contributions known by the boss's boss and the whole senior management team."

In fact, you should be getting your message out beyond your organization and be well connected within your industry, advises Tim Cork, president of Toronto-based career transition company NexCareer Inc. and author of the advice book *Tapping the Iceberg*.

He recommends developing a 30-second "elevator speech" that quickly articulates your strengths and recent achievements for prospective employers as well as industry colleagues. "As well, make the effort to build connections to recruiters even if you are not actively looking and to make opportunities to develop social relationships with high achievers who can coach and mentor you."

STAY CLOSE TO THE CORE

"In a recession, companies tend to move back to their core expertise and new ventures are shelved," says Beth Oakes, managing partner for executive career consultancy Miller Dallas Inc. in Toronto. So if you are working in an unproven area, keep involved in projects seen as more central to the business as well.

"It may be that working in head office is more secure than in a branch operation of a company but, in a downturn, anything that is not a proven money maker might be at risk of pruning," she says.

LEARN NEW TRICKS

Becoming a continuous learner not only means you will have the skills needed to stay on top in your role, but also that you have transferable skills if you need to jump to a new employer, says Adria Trowhill, principal with Posi-TRAK Coaching and Consulting Inc. in Toronto.

Old dogs who learn new tricks have better chances of survival. "If you were an employer and you had some innovative new talent you were grooming for the future and some older employees stuck in their ways and nearing retirement, who would you choose to cut?" asks Toronto-based psychologist Sharyn Salsberg Ezin, a speaker on

workplace issues and author of *Living through Transitions*. "So be an old timer with fresh ideas and demonstrate that you are as keen as the young bloods. People will clue into that."

Employers may be more reluctant to get rid of older workers now than in past recessions, Ms. Ezrin suggests. If nothing else, there's a pragmatic reason: The sheer number of baby boomers in the work force will make them too expensive to pay off to leave.

BE PROFESSIONAL

Downsizing is a great excuse to dismiss employees who whine, grumble, abuse subordinates and demonstrate a poor attitude, says career coach Lori Elliott, a partner in Elliott, Bornhold & Associates in Toronto.

So if there is any tension between you and senior managers, now's the time to put on a smile, and mend any fences that have been broken, she says.

Oh, and keep the professional lines drawn. "Engage your professional network for support but don't cry on their shoulders," Ms. Elliott adds. "Save your blubbering for your spouse or the dog."

SURF JOB SITES

(BUT Don't get caught)

It's prudent to keep a finger on the pulse of the job market, and keep your résumé up to date, especially if you work in a vulnerable sector.

"The fact is, people should think about what potentially could happen - not five minutes before it happens," says Monika Morrow, vice-president and national practice leader at Toronto-based Right Management.

It's essential to develop skills that could be applied across a range of industry sectors, "and then do your environmental scan ... looking at what's happening in the broader market." One good place to start: on-line job sites - but keep your surfing out of your boss's line of sight.

Consider moving

Unemployment rates vary across the country, from a high of 13.6 per cent in Newfoundland and Labrador in 2007, to a low of 3.5 per cent in Alberta.

For those who are at risk of losing their jobs, and have transferable skills, here's a scenario to consider: "Take the buyout ...and run to Alberta," says Ralph Shedletsy, chief operating officer of Toronto-based Knightsbridge Human Capital Solutions.

DON'T BE COMPLACENT

"Any employee, from the mail room rookie on up to the chief executive officer, who is thinking they can't become a victim of recession could be in for a huge shock," warns Ms. McCauley, the career coach. "When layoffs and downsizing occur, companies make these decisions based on relative dispensability, and no one is by definition indispensable," she says.

And due to an inevitable drop in incomes and consumer spending in a long economic slowdown, no industry is immune from recession, adds Bob Lank, vice-president of business development for executive coaching company Integra Leadership in Toronto.

Industries that deal in discretionary goods tend to be the most sensitive to economic slowdowns and already, there is heavy job cutting in the auto and car parts industry, retailers and consumer products makers.

Industries that are traditionally more resilient in a recession are tobacco and liquor, energy production, health care and pharmaceuticals and government, Mr. Lank says, but even these suffer in long slides.

KEEP YOUR HEAD DOWN

This is not the time for hiding in a foxhole.

If you want to be among those a company keeps when the economy is sinking, you have to clearly demonstrate your performance, personal skills and potential are worth rescuing, says Ralph Turfus, a mentor with Acetech, a Vancouver-based coaching organization for chief executive officers.

RESIST CHANGE

Employees at all levels have to work harder to prove their worth in an environment in which employers are considering cost reductions, Ms. Morrow adds. This means adapting to changing corporate priorities, whether that means taking on a new role or learning a new technology.

The point is, be pro-active. Ms. Morrow passes on this observation from a colleague in the career-transition field: "Hope is not a strategy."

"You should approach each assignment with the attitude, 'I know we can do this better and let me try,' " Ms. Elliott recommends.

And by constantly looking for ways to move beyond your own job description, and volunteering for projects that meet coming needs, you will demonstrate enthusiasm. "Employers appreciate that and you will be seen as an essential asset to managers who are being challenged to find new directions," Ms. Elliott says.

STAY ON A SINKING SHIP

If you work in a depressed sector, such as forestry or manufacturing, you have to look outside your company and, possibly, outside your industry to find more stable job opportunities, says Ralph Shedletsky, chief operating officer of Toronto-based Knightsbridge Human Capital Solutions.

"So, for example, people who work in manufacturing ought not to be surprised that there's been an impact as a result of the dollar and, therefore, they may well need to think about how their skill sets apply to other industries - which means learning the skill of researching," Mr. Shedletsky says.

And it also means making contacts who can help you if you have to make a leap to new industry, Ms. Keenan adds. "Dedicated souls can find themselves trapped if they have given so much to their companies that they have developed few, if any, outside contacts."

LIVE PAYCHEQUE TO PAYCHEQUE

Those who have built up a nest-egg are in a much better position to take advantage of that enticing buy-out offer, or to weather a lay-off. Financial planners advise that all employees - no matter how secure they feel - should have enough money saved up to cover at least six months' of living expenses.

The reality, "to be frank, is that very few people have that," says career consultant Dorothy Keenan, founder of Vancouver-based FutureWorks.

PANIC

If the worst happens, and you are let go, "it's absolutely natural and perfectly human to bring up a whole host of emotions.

But take time to reflect," advises Geri Ramsay, an executive coach with Level Eight Coaching of Salt Spring Island, B.C. instead of rushing into resume preparation and reference gathering, decide what it is you want from this situation, she advises.

Talking with a professional who can serve as an unbiased sounding board will allow you to process through what is happening and purposefully design next steps, whether they be exploring other roles within your current organization or courageously stepping onto another career track, she adds.

To the lifeboats!

Ralph Turfus has one technique to help keep you from getting tossed overboard when the company ship is sinking. He calls it the "lifeboat drill."

It was a regular exercise carried out at Class Software Ltd., a company that Mr. Turfus founded in the 1970s and ran as its chief executive officer until he sold it in 2004.

How did it work? Managers were asked annually to decide who they would save and who would be let go if the company were forced to lighten its staff load. Those who would survive would score best on four criteria:

Their performance had to consistently meet or surpass quarterly goals.

They demonstrated interpersonal skills, including the ability to deal with difficult customers and build long-lasting relationships.

Their innovation and creativity consistently led to new approaches.

They were on a continual personal development curve through training and planning for career advancement.

They are four criteria anyone who wants to hang on to a job should strive to meet, says Mr. Turfus, now a mentor with Acetech, a Vancouver-based coaching organization for chief executives.

"Managers who see all these factors will see you as the cream of the organization who deserves to be kept."

© The Globe and Mail

SPONSORED LINKS

[Costa Rica Ocean View Land Pre-Development Prices](#)

Prime 11/4 Acre sites. Gated Community. Free Beach Club. \$25K Down, 0% Int.
www.costalandsales.com

[Ethanol Stock News - GFET](#)

BioFuels, Ethanol, Green Energy. Alternative Energy Growth Stock Investment.

© Copyright 2008 CTVglobemedia Publishing Inc. All Rights Reserved.

CTVglobemedia

globeandmail.com and The Globe and Mail are divisions of CTVglobemedia Publishing Inc., 444 Front St. W., Toronto, ON Canada M5V 2S9
Phillip Crawley, Publisher