

Surviving Your Career

By Karel Murray

I'm at a meeting, but I'm not listening. I look attentive, even involved. But all that broils through my mind is how close my friend David came to losing his job at 50 years of age. In the last corporate downsizing episode, David's family security was threatened - not just financially, but personal esteem plummeted. More disturbingly, he didn't understand why he was in jeopardy in the first place. While David prided himself on his diligent performance, attention to detail, faithfully relocating wherever he was needed in his twenty year career. David believed his company valued his efforts - until the merger.

His company, purchased by a newer "hip" competitor, presented a complete reorganization of personnel, especially for the manufacturer's representatives. Turmoil surged in every department as uncertainty grew regarding how the new owners conducted business.

A disregard of the traditional hands on manner of doing business became apparent in corporate directives. The face to face business David fostered over a twenty year period skidded to a halt. High technology superseded the need for high touch relationships. Corporate management preferred non interpersonal ways of building customer/client relationships through phone, fax or internet. Why waste company funds by driving out to meet with the client?

Directives regarding profitability implemented new procedures and techniques. The corporate focus centered on gaining new customers rather than nurturing the existing ones. David reacted as though a bucket of ice water had been dumped on him. His territory expanded to one of the largest and most profitable precisely due to his "down home" sales technique.

Rationally, David knew that the directives would enhance rather than compromise his effectiveness in customer service. He feared change. Over the years, he had developed and maintained a bond of face to face trust and friendship with his clients. He worked his territory with self control and diligence. David developed a sense of daily freedom. He perceived the change as stifling his independence by trapping him in an office from nine to five.

His concerns needed to be addressed. Surely, this new management understood the fragility of customer / representative relationships. David expressed his apprehension during a meeting he scheduled with his Vice President. Believing he came from a position of strength, David felt the corporation would recognize and consider his expertise by working with him to gradually integrate the new structure.

Nope. They weren't interested. Everyone had to incorporate the same procedures, which stood as the company's hallmark for success.

Stunned, David realized his position with the company could be in jeopardy. Was he prepared to sacrifice his career to stand behind his convictions?

How does a person prepare for a complete culture change and reorientation of assets and desired skill levels? What was once safe becomes a loaded weapon, sited upon economic well being.

David is not alone in his story.

Frequently, I read about companies downsizing and press releases that emphasize the importance of corporate balance and profitability. Trouble is . the largest cash savings is only possible through the reduction of human capital, facilities, and automation.

It's the gut wrenching realization we get when we learn we're expendable.

The lack of control over situations like this creates fodder for many sleepless nights as you worry over your children's college funds, retirement funds or just paying the monthly bills. You discover multitudes of ways to deal with the stress, from plummeting into self despair, anger, anxiety, resentment, relief, or excitement about the unexpected prospect of building a new, exhilarating career.

So rather than focusing on ways to self destruct, let's lay down the groundwork to plan for future career opportunities.

6 Ways To Carve Out A Future

1. Attitude

Eliminate negative thoughts regarding your company's shortcomings. Instead, focus on becoming a lynchpin of positive energy and teamwork. Bring concerns or issues to management's attention succinctly and without condemnation. Provide solutions. Avoid placing your superiors in a defensive stance. I've learned that people tend to push back when cornered.

2. Delay Gratification and Reduce Debt

The significance of the debt Americans accumulates is staggering. Debt eliminates options. It's close to impossible to feel any manner of security when financial liabilities outweigh income (living from pay check to pay check). Loss of income becomes less devastating when you minimize debt - you create room to react responsibly to unforeseen circumstances.

Establish a workable financial plan now and begin by creating an emergency resource fund. Try to ignore purchases that are not essential until you have reached your goal.

3. Education

Use every opportunity to attend intriguing courses as well as those that provide specific job training for your current position. Consider concentrating on those topics that could develop into careers that would allow you to earn an income in an area you enjoy.

4. Update Your Resume Annually

Critically review your performance and achievements by writing them down formally in a resume. Outline your career objectives and evaluate whether your present situation fulfills those ideals. Early assessment of your evolution over the last year may determine a new career direction or alert you to an "at risk" current position.

5. Network

Get out and establish meaningful relationships with people in your industry or the field of your choice. In addition, set up informational interviews with businesses that interest you. Prepare for a planned career move either within your firm or to an outside company.

6. Focus On The Target

Chart the items that you consider important to you - your family, independence, career recognition, or net worth? If drawn in three or four different directions, this can be emotionally destructive and reflect in your performance and overall health. Clearly determine your top three priorities and plan accordingly.

Next time when you want to react in position of turmoil, ask yourself, "Can you afford the consequences?" This question is powerful in its simplicity. Work through your response in a manner that ensures that you stay on track with your true life plan.

Corporate America doesn't owe you a career or a living. So what are you going to do to plan for your future security?

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