

PLAN AHEAD BEFORE THE LAYOFF AXE FALLS

By Daisy Wright
The Wright Career Solution

“The possibilities are numerous once we decide to act, not react.”

-- Gloria Anzaldua

In one short week – this past July 18 to 22 – the axe fell at a number of companies. Ford Motor Company of Canada sent layoff notices to 335 of its employees in Windsor. Hewlett Packard announced it was laying off approximately 15,000 employees; Kodak 12,000; PNC Financial 3,000 and Kimberley Clark 6,000. Reasons ranged from "maintaining a tighter rein on costs" to creating a "simpler nimbler" organization". Such news is painful for those directly affected, and unsettling for the rest of us because of the rippling effect these layoffs have on other areas of the economy.

Although the news is shocking, layoffs don't just happen. There are usually some subtle signs that changes are coming. If you are becoming a bit jittery at work because things just don't seem right, conduct your own due diligence. Has the company been in the news lately? What for? Did it meet analysts' expectations? Did it have a management shakeup? Are there dramatic fluctuations of its share price? The answers to these questions will be a good indicator of where your company is heading.

Layoffs, downsizing, restructuring, whatever name it's called, is a way of life in today's economy. When it's time to restructure, years of service and loyalty will not guarantee anyone a position in the new organization. In some cases, people have had to reapply for their old jobs. But, it doesn't have to come as a surprise. Put a **Plan B** in place by preparing for the day when the axe might fall at your desk. Make it your responsibility to manage your own career, to swim out and meet your ship, not wait until it comes ashore. Such a mindset will help lessen the impact of a layoff, and will enable you to weather the storm if and when it comes. Here are some tips to help with your preparation:

1. Keep an eye out for tell-tale signs in your company. This is not to suggest that you become paranoid, but don't act like the ostrich with its head in the sand.
2. Take advantage of learning opportunities offered by the company. These may be formal training where you attend classes outside of work, or free in-house courses offered as lunch-and-learn programs. Don't forget the Internet which offers a variety of learning opportunities. Although your job may appear safe at the moment, you shouldn't stop learning. Henry Ford once said, "*Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at 20 or 80...*".
3. Be on the lookout for internal vacancies, and assess yourself to see if your skills match the requirements, then submit an application. There could also be an opportunity to job-shadow another employee or be cross-trained on a system.
4. Make yourself indispensable (at least give it a try) by keeping abreast of industry developments. Watch, listen and read the news and see if you can use any of the information to enhance your current position.
5. Start a journal of your special achievements, comments made by your supervisor or coworkers and awards and recognitions received. Review your performance appraisals. What did your supervisor say about you? Did you work on a special project? Were you a member of a team that developed a system which added to the company's profitability? These notes will come in handy when you are ready to brush up your résumé.
6. Develop and nurture a network of contacts, even if you're not yet looking for a job. Many people have the misconception that networking is done only when one is job hunting. It is an ongoing process; it takes time to grow, but will be valuable when faced with a layoff or when changing careers.

7. Join a professional association and contribute. You'll learn new skills, meet new people and build credibility among your peers. Many organizations send their job postings to some of these associations before they hit the newspapers. Saying you are a member of a professional association will be a great addition to your résumé.
8. Arrange informational interviews to learn more about a field you are interested in, or to keep current with trends in your industry.
9. There might be someone whom you admire in or outside your company. Ask if you could discuss your uncertainties or your career plans with them. It's not a weakness to ask for help.
10. There are times when a layoff is just what you may need to propel you to action; to change careers; to do something different. Redirect your energy into something productive and don't feel sorry for yourself. Take a long hard look at where you are in your career. Are you satisfied? Have you reached a plateau in the company? Is it time for a change?

After all this, if you are still uncertain about your future, enlist the help of a career coach who can steer you in the right direction. Whatever you do, make proactive choices now; not reactive ones later.

Daisy Wright is the president and founder of The Wright Career Solution. She is a trained Career Development Practitioner, who has been empowering individuals to find career success through effective coaching strategies. Daisy can be contacted at (905) 840-7039 or through her website at www.thewrightcareer.com.

Copyright 2005 – Daisy Wright. All rights reserved. This article from The Wright Career Solution may be distributed or reproduced as long as the copyright and website are included.