

Protect Your Job!

Surveys recently have suggested that we could be in for another twelve months of redundancies before the economy really starts to turn around. Unemployment could reach 3.2 million, maybe more. Redundancy is a possibility for most of us, and the question has to be, how do you protect your job in a climate like this?

Many companies have transparent redundancy policies, last in first out, or the deleting of an entire team. But for most companies the decision as to who to let go is a personal one; the reasons may not be publicly cited in order to avoid being taken to an employment tribunal but in practice the company decides who they want to keep and who they want to release. They base this decision on the performance of individual staff members and their value to the company.

So the first principle to adhere to in keeping your job is to make sure you maximise your value to the company. This is of course a basic principle of any career strategy; if you want a successful and enjoyable career you need to choose one that you are good at and where you add value. But this becomes even more important when you are trying to protect your job. Firms will not rush to make someone redundant who is outperforming.

Doing your job well is not just about doing your allocated tasks efficiently and successfully. It requires you to be proactive, looking to see what else needs to be done, anticipating future tasks, understanding the reasons why the company needs you to do your work, taking an active interest in the company and its future. You need to be seen as a key player within the company, not someone who turns up, does their job and goes home.

Start by reading as much as you can about the company you work for. Look at the company's published materials; its internal communications, press releases, annual reports, staff magazines and so on. And read as much as you can in the business and national media. Career Energy clients can access all this information through our Alert Research service. Get yourself into a position where you can have meaningful, informed discussions about the company, its strategies and its future. Understand where you fit in to the big picture. So that when you perform a particular task you can see why you are doing it, who will benefit from it and what its impact will be.

Of course this is much easier to do if you are interested and committed to your company, and the job you perform in it. So, those who manage their careers well and have taken positive, proactive decisions to work in their field will find it much more straightforward to protect their job. This is because it is the right job for them, and they will be far more motivated to defend it. True, that is not much comfort if you are not proactive in managing your career and fear redundancy but before we discuss that, let's look at what career management means and how it can assist you in the long term.

The most effective form of career management is one in which you work to a career action plan that has clearly defined goals and a strategy for getting there.

Setting your goals requires you to be aware of your potential and to have evaluated what you want to achieve in your career. This in turn requires a thorough appraisal of your skills, interests and personal qualities, something that is not easy to do on your own but with which a Career Energy professional will be glad to help you.

Career management is a lifelong process. We recommend that you revisit your goals and plan at least once a year and that you have clearly defined, timetabled action points. This means that should your job become at risk due to the economy, or other factors beyond your control, you will at least know what your next steps are.

People who manage their careers well know what jobs they want to be doing, and in which organisations. Good career management helps you to deal with impending redundancy because it helps you to turn a crisis into an opportunity. Being threatened with job loss provides the catalyst for you to implement the next stage in your career plan. However, whether or not you can implement this next stage immediately may well depend on the wider economic climate.

Which brings us back to the question of what else you can do to protect your job if you have not managed your career fully, or if your action plan is vulnerable in the current climate.

In many ways the actions that you need to take are little different from those you would implement if you were angling for a promotion. You need to be visible, and your achievements need to be recognised. It doesn't matter how well you perform if those who make the decisions are not aware of what you are doing. But at the same time, if you blow your own trumpet too loudly, you run the risk of putting peoples' backs up and alienating them.

First and foremost you need to know what is expected of you and your team, and to be sure that what you deliver exceeds expectations. We discussed earlier the importance of understanding the company that you work for, understanding where you fit in and demonstrating your knowledge in conversation with your colleagues and managers. It is worth assessing at the beginning of each day exactly what tasks and outcomes are expected of you, and what else you can do over and above expectations, which will help to advance your reputation in the company.

Record this in a daily journal and at the end of the day add notes indicating how you performed for each task. Also make a note of anything else you did during the day, whether planned or on impulse, that others may find praiseworthy. This will help you to see more clearly exactly how you are performing, and your value to the company.

Make sure that your managers are aware of what you do, and that they see you as someone on whom they can rely. This is both about projecting yourself well, and about your attitude at work.

There is a fine line between making sure that your managers are aware of what you do and value your input, and being over assertive. If you sing your own praises

every time you accomplish something of note, you will soon find that you are alienating people; nobody likes a show off. But equally, if you keep quiet you will not be noticed; it is far too easy for what you have done to be overlooked amongst the rest of the activity in your workplace.

You may find it helpful to team up with two or three others and to collectively promote each other to your bosses. Having a colleague draw their attention to your achievements is not going to alienate them in the same way as if you do it yourself, and you will reciprocate the favour for your colleague.

Attitude is also important. You may perform every task successfully and efficiently. But you also need to demonstrate willingness. It does not matter how good you are, if you are anything less than willing, enthusiastic and good natured then people are going to find it difficult to deal with you and may well be relieved to put your name forward as part of a redundancy programme.

If you have not had an appraisal for some time you may wish to request one. Some companies will agree to this, even if it is not yet due. This gives you the opportunity to understand more clearly how you are seen within the company and to take appropriate action.

At the end of the day, it is a fine art to make yourself visible and indispensable. Exactly how you do it will depend very much on where you work, its culture and people. If you are worried about your job and are not sure how best to implement your visibility strategy, come and talk to a Career Energy consultant. It is much easier to work these things out in partnership with a professional who can see things objectively.