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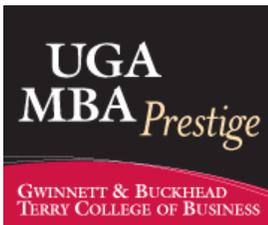
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Preparing For A Company Layoff

Layoff on the horizon? Here are strategies for making the best of a bad situation.

by Beverly Y. Langford, author of "The Etiquette Edge" and president of LMA Communication. Dr. Langford teaches management communication in the Robinson College of Business, Georgia State University.

September 8, 2008

Your best friend sent you a text saying that her whole department was laid off this morning. Your father had to take early retirement last year. All around you, people are dealing with the realities of a tough economy, and companies are slashing headcount to survive. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that in the first half of 2008, 1.2 million people lost jobs, not because of poor performance, but because of circumstances beyond their individual control. To make matters worse, the rumors are flying within your own company. What can you do to avoid being laid off or to make the best of the bad situation if the worst happens?

Make yourself indispensable and visible. Do your best work, and avoid developing a negative attitude. Layoff rumors wreak havoc on morale. Stay away from the break room doom and gloom conversations. Instead, focus on contributing noticeably to the company. If a company is considering a layoff, it's usually a cost-cutting measure. Show that you are always finding ways to do your work more efficiently and save the company money.

Get on management's radar screen. Go out of your way to speak to or introduce yourself to decision makers at meetings and corporate functions. Have something substantial to say about the company or the industry.

Collect emails, customer commendations and other documents that attest to your capabilities and contributions. If a client or customer compliments you, ask that person to write your boss about something specific you have done and send you a copy. Most people are happy to do so, and you will have a record whether the layoffs happen or your job is secure.

Update your skills. Take advantage of any training or development that the company offers. If the organization is cutting back on training, consider investing in outside courses or certifications to enhance your marketability. Stay abreast of the **latest technology**.

Put your financial house in order. Lose the \$4.00 lattes and Prada handbags. Establish an emergency fund with enough money to cover your living expenses for three to six months. You can celebrate when the crisis passes or you get the great new job.

Have a contingency plan for covering your health care when you are between jobs. Use your credit cards with caution, paying the balance each month, and consider establishing a line of credit now, while you have a job.

Get ready to jump-start your job search. Dust off your resume and make sure that it focuses on specific accomplishments and quantifiable results. Get a personal email address with a professional name. "Psycho baby" or "Hot chick" may be fun with friends but won't play well when you send an email to a C-level executive or an HR manager. Have some personal business cards printed with your contact information. You can even create good-looking cards on your computer.

Keep an open mind about moving to a different job or industry. Often layoffs create the opportunity to go in a new direction. And, if the layoff happens, don't be embarrassed about telling everyone you know that you are looking for a job. You never know which contact will produce results.

Network, network, network. If you have been empathetic and responsive to others who have

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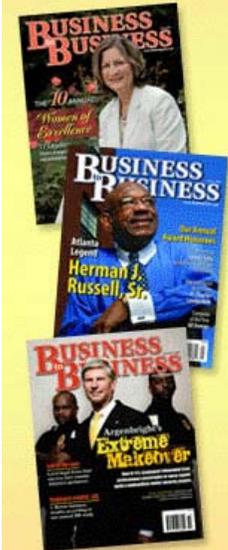
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lost jobs, they will be eager to help you when the tables are turned. Broaden your professional and personal network by joining and attending alumni events, professional associations, conferences and non-profit functions.

Don't forget to network within your own company. If influential people in other departments know and appreciate you, they may place you somewhere else in the organization if a layoff occurs in your particular area. At the same time, build a contact list of coworkers, clients, customers, vendors and other associates in case you no longer have access to their phone numbers and email addresses, and flag those you may want to use as references.

Layoffs are disturbing and stressful, but taking some steps to anticipate and meet the situation head on can see you through the hard times and prepare you to shine even more brightly when better days return.

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