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How to secure your job in troubled times

By Anu Sharma

Your job context may largely remain unchanged - but you will now need to be successful in a totally new environmental context...

Whichever way you turn, discussions, analysis and commentary across media underline how bad the times are, how many job losses are expected, which sectors will see business closures etc -- negativity resounds across. So, what should you do ?

First, please remember all that information is at a generic level -- it does not necessarily translate to doomsday for you - at the individual level. Your country's economy is impacted - therefore your life will also be impacted in many ways including your career. But, it is entirely your choice - to create opportunities and successes or become a downturn statistic. It will be difficult to be neither.

The past few years have spoilt us all - we have got used to operating in times of high growth. Till the recent past, all conversations centred around expansion, investing in infrastructure, headcount addition, shortage of talent, multiple job offers, healthy salary growth etc.

Budgets were tough to negotiate but available, spends were critiqued but accepted. The primary challenge was to crack the "problems of plenty."

The current economic scenario presents a new opportunity - "to build with less." To make the less go further. To do more with the less. Your job context may largely remain unchanged - but you will now need to be successful in a totally new environmental context.

The business demands have changed - the opportunity lies in you recognising this and identifying how you should change to deliver to the new mandate. Change your goals, review your KRA's, suggest how the department goals should be altered, how the company can be more efficient - take an active stance in creating opportunity for yourself in your current company.

Start a dialogue

So start with how all this economic upheaval will impact your organization. Talk to your leaders to understand which aspect of the business are going to be under pressure, what is the strategy the company is adopting and what will the business priorities be over the short term.

This understanding of the changed company stance will help you proactively align yourself to the new mandate and move to the next step of exploiting the opportunity for yourself.

Next, review your role and contributions in the light of the new strategy. What are the expectations from your role according to the new strategy ? Is your area of work

likely to get marginalised ? Would your team headcount need to be trimmed ? Would the demands from your role multiply ?

In all instances your response should be to review your responsibilities - see where you need to make an impact now, how your contributions can be more valuable to the company, how you can take on more / different responsibilities. Put down clear goals which you would now own.

Also review the areas your Department has been managing - are there aspects you can suggest which should be changed, done differently to retain customers, increase productivity, reduce costs - make your list and now you are ready to have a discussion with your boss - and move ahead on exploiting the opportunity. Present to your boss, your understanding of the new business context and the new company priorities.

Discuss with her, how the Department can contribute given the new context and priorities and how you are ready to do deliver to the changed requirements. Share the details you have worked out regarding your goals.

Proactive planning

During this discussion, you should ensure both your Boss and you reach a common understanding of the changes you should proactively plan for in the Department.

It will be good if you can get an agreement from her to widen the scope of the discussion to other key members of the team - for the plan to be successful, it should cover the whole team or Department. The whole team needs work to a sharper schedule - plan tightly, reduce buffers, respond quickly, drive closures, meet goals. If you have people responsibilities in your role, you can also be the change agent - enabling the teams transition to the changed context.

And all these will require you to adopt new perspectives, experiment with new ideas, methods - grow your skills across new dimensions.

This is the opportunity - you are getting to add to your skill base, gaining the experience of delivering in tough times, and adding momentum to your career.

There is opportunity out there. Exploit the opportunity the tough times are throwing up. Generate positive momentum. And keep yourself off the RIF (Reduction in Workforce) list.

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