

## MAKE YOUR CAREER RECESSION-PROOF

*Even in times of economic turbulence, there are things you can do to survive – and thrive – in your chosen career, says Julie Blunt, Executive Coach and Career Management Specialist.*

*Turbulence is life force. It is opportunity. Let's love turbulence and use it for change. – Ramsay Clark*

The global recession may be showing signs of abating, but it appears that people across the globe are more worried now than they were six months ago about losing their job. Plenty more know someone who is no longer employed, according to a recent poll. In the Ipsos/Reuters survey published this month, of 23,000 people in 23 countries, 53% named jobs and unemployment as their top concern – a 12-point increase in the past six months. Nearly three-quarters said they know someone who has lost a job.

In addition, the latest official UK unemployment figure has risen once again, showing that even though the recession here is officially over, it will take some time for organisations to start recruiting again.

So, how can you make sure you are as prepared as possible to weather the economic storms which may affect your workplace? How can you proactively manage your career in turbulent times? Here are some top tips for ensuring that whatever happens, you are in the best position to meet the challenges ahead.

### **Develop clear career goals**

Even in tough times, it's vital to remain focussed on your overall career goals. If you don't have any, then take time out to get really clear on your long term aspirations. What do you want to be doing – which profession/industry? Who do you ultimately want to be working for – a large corporate, a small organisation, or for yourself? What's important to you in your future career? This will give you a clear destination, and help keep you motivated – even if you have to take some unscheduled detours along the way.

### **Keep learning**

Nothing is more vital in times of change than to keep learning. Make sure you're up-to-speed on current thinking for your profession



or industry. Develop new skills that may be useful to you in the future and which relate to your career goals. Consider personal development which could help you be more personally effective and develop your interpersonal skills. If your employer can't fund you, be creative and find low cost ways of developing yourself. Use your library to access relevant books and articles, volunteer for project work which could help you develop new skills.

### **Develop your personal brand**

In the working environment, it can be a challenge to show who you are and what you stand for. Re-branding can help you create a positive impact, revitalise your performance and help you to progress in your career. It's all about sending a clear message about who you are, what you can offer and demonstrating this through everything you do. To do this, firstly ask yourself the questions – What do I want to be? What do I want to stand for? What do I offer? Now develop your personal brand statement based on your responses.

Next, do a personal 'stock-take' by reviewing your skills, knowledge, experience and personal strengths and assess how well they fit your brand statement. Work to address any gaps you've identified.

### Stay close to the business

If you're in touch with developments in your organisation and industry, you will be much better placed to spot career opportunities as well as to predict the changes that are likely to happen. Keep abreast of changes in the marketplace, with your customers and with your organisation strategy by talking to your business leaders, reading trade papers and networking with colleagues around the organisation – particularly in customer facing departments – to find out what's happening 'at the coal face'.

### Build your network

Having a network allows people to be in the know when employment opportunities come along. By developing strong work relationships with people you have worked with in the past and those that you have met through professional associations or courses of study, you remain visible. Think about how you could use on-line networking sites – such as LinkedIn and Facebook – as tools to widen your network. And don't forget about your friends and family. Not only may they be able to help you find a new opportunity, they can also provide much needed support and encouragement to enable you to stay focussed and positive.

### Consider a 'portfolio career'

A 'portfolio career' is suitable for those people who do not want to work in one full-time job and who want to have a variety in their working life. Rather than working for one company or doing the same work every day, you use your gifts and skills on a variety of activities and projects. An example of a person with a portfolio career is an interpreter who works two days a week with one employer, teaches language part-time at a local college, and works as a freelance interpreter on the side. This option won't suit everybody, but for some it is a good way of 'spreading the risk' of your working life.

### Get noticed

Actively look for opportunities to increase your visibility within the organisation. If you're attending a high level presentation, plan to ask at least one question. Offer to take the lead on high profile tasks and activities – and



then deliver! If you don't feel you have these opportunities, then make the most of the work you are doing – how can you demonstrate the benefits of the work you already do? If you're staying with the organisation, you will have demonstrated your capability to move onwards in the organisation and position yourself for the future. If you don't stay, then you've increased your credibility with your business network which could prove vital in the coming months.

### Enjoy work anyway

So while you're working on your career, how do you deal with the insecurity in the meantime? The key is to enjoy your job despite the uncertainty. By doing this, we become more efficient and even reduce the risk of losing our jobs. One way to do this is to talk to colleagues about the situation, but instead of moaning about things you can't control, try just focussing on those things you can influence. This creates a much more positive, constructive focus. Ask yourselves what mood you want in the company? What would be a good atmosphere to have in your department until you get certainty (which of course may never come)? Work to create this as a group. You'll be surprised how infectious it is. And in the meantime, you'll be in a better place to focus on putting your plans into action.

If you're serious about developing your career, and have found these ideas interesting, you can get more in-depth tools, information and inspiration from other 'Hot Topic Articles' available for download here.