

## To escape coming layoffs, display your strengths for top management

“I’m a manager in a company that will be laying people off within the next few months. I supervise a group working on a project that senior-level managers have been very interested in. I’m worried, however, that I might be included in this layoff round because I have been working a flexible four-day work schedule, which, at the time it was approved, was considered a special perk. I’m afraid now, however, in light of all the cutbacks, that my schedule situation will be perceived negatively. How can I improve my chances of survival?”

Even if things are beginning to improve a little in this economy, companies are still laying people off, and managers like you are not exempt. Not only do you enjoy a flexible schedule but you are probably paid more than the average worker in the company. You are working on a high-profile project, but at the same time, you’re not at the top of the organization. So you could be vulnerable.

Obviously, you can’t control what others are going to do, but you can have some control of others’ perceptions of you, which will matter in the layoff process, wrote Janet Banks, co-author of a *Harvard Business Review* article from 2008 called “How to Protect Your Job in a Recession.”

In essence, if you want to be perceived as a survivor in a time like this, you will need to make sure that you are acting like one. “The ability to have a positive attitude is critical, as opposed to a person who’s so fearful that they take everyone in the downward spiral with them,” she told MSNBC. “You’re in good shape if you can project positive energy and look at what is most relevant in terms of the work at hand.”

This is not an easy task during times of uncertainty, but that positive attitude is crucial, nonetheless, says Vaughan Evans, a consultant, career strategist and author of “Backing U! A Business-Oriented Guide to Backing Your Passion and Achieving Career Success.”

“If avoiding the unemployment line is the main reason you are hanging onto your job,” he says, “you are at risk of losing it at any time—to someone who is more enthusiastic and passionate about work. Think about it: If you were a boss, wouldn’t you be more apt



### MANAGERS AT WORK

Kathleen Driscoll

to hang onto the employee with a sunny disposition and a positive-enthusiastic attitude? Employees who lack this kind of passion at work are prime targets for layoffs.”

Evans says your flexible four-day schedule will matter less to others in the long run if you can successfully work out your “true value” to the company and let people know what that is. He outlines a five-step process for doing that:

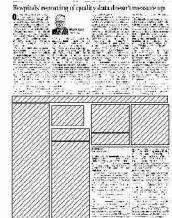
■ Identify the strengths your company requires. “Think of yourself as a business,” he says. “Who are your competitors, inside and outside the firm? What are your customers’ (upper management’s) needs from service providers such as yourself? Do an analysis on several criteria, including effectiveness (skills, qualifications and experience); efficiency (how quickly you deliver); range (what range of services/skills you offer); relationship (level of rapport, communication and quality of attitude) and price (How much are you costing the company? Would you be willing to take a pay cut?).”

“Which of these strengths are most important to your employer?” Evans asks. “Write them down and rank them in order of greatest importance to the success of your employer.”

■ Identify your top strengths. List the half dozen strengths, qualities or skills for which you have been praised by upper-level managers in your performance review and at other times. “They are the areas in which you feel masterful,” Evans says.

■ Rank your strengths. Put these half dozen or so strengths in order of strongest to weakest by ranking them on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is highest and 5 is “strong but still developing,” he says.

■ Compare the two lists. “Which top-ranked strengths on your personal list intersect with top-ranked strengths in the company’s required list? Use your judgment to pull out the most promising top



two,” Evans adds.

■ Invest in these top two. “For now, forget your weaknesses,” he says. “Instead, invest all of your energy in becoming a superstar in your top two strengths, ones that are also most critical to the success of your company.” You should take a creative approach: take classes, read books, attend conferences, do research, join professional groups, find a mentor, do whatever it takes to become “an unparalleled leader” in these two key skills.

Finally, Evans says, do what it takes to make sure that senior managers know about your strengths. “Beat your drum! This is no time to be shy in self-promotion,” he says.

*Managers at Work is a bimonthly column exploring the issues and challenges facing managers. Contact Kathleen Driscoll with questions or comments by phone at (585) 249-9295 or by e-mail at [kadriscoll@aol.com](mailto:kadriscoll@aol.com).*