

## **Becoming an Indispensable Employee**

### **By Trenton Hightower**

Is there such a thing?

Is there really anyone who is absolutely irreplaceable in the workplace anymore?

For better or worse, the answer is probably “no.”

That being said, there is still a lot you can do on the job to avoid becoming a target when the next round of lay-offs, downsizing, reductions in force, and budget cuts comes around. The time you invest demonstrating your value to the company is always well spent. Keeping a few things in mind on the job can help you take charge of your future employment.

### **Know Your Job**

Becoming an expert at what you do for the company is the most obvious ingredient in the indispensability equation. It's also the most irrefutable job-retention strategy. I frequently think of the approach a colleague shared with me about how he held onto his job through a difficult period for his industry during a recession.

For the first year, my colleague's goal was to learn his job. During Year #2, he focused on doing his job well. By Year #3, he was ready to use a Performance Improvement process to attempt to do his job better than anyone else had done it before, or was doing it now. By the 4<sup>th</sup> year, he was taking his position to new heights, maximizing his benefit to the company.

Throughout this process, he says, he took care to show initiative and clarify his responsibilities up front with his manager. He didn't wait for performance evaluations; he sought honest feedback as often as necessary. In short, he was proactive and directive—he took responsibility for learning his job, improving his performance, and leveraging his position to the company's best advantage.

My colleague not only survived one of the roughest economic periods for his industry, he emerged on the other side—with a promotion.

Review your own situation. Are there certifications or accreditations you could be working toward that would separate you from your colleagues? Any workshops or classes you might attend to increase your knowledge or sharpen your skills? What about professional associations you could join? Apply for special recognitions and leadership awards through these organizations, and in the community.

### **Network Creatively**

Relationships are critical to success on the job. Knowing people throughout the organization will give you deeper roots when the winds of change blow. Ask a veteran colleague to mentor you on a specific project. Look into some one-on-one time with someone whose job functions are connected closely to yours. Become a trainer or coach for others when appropriate.

## **Be Enthusiastic**

At all costs, don't be the office Eeyore. You remember...the children's book character who could never find one thing positive in any situation? You don't have to be a Polyanna, but do lead off with a can-do spirit, no matter how rough things get.

The most discouraging words to a manager are an immediate "That can't be done." Even when something looks like a stretch given the time and resources available, try saying "Let me think about that and get back to you on Tuesday." Your positive attitude and open mind will go a long way toward building an *esprit de corps* with your supervisor.

In conclusion, picture two employees. Both have adequate training, an advanced certification and 5 years experience. Both have a strong job performance. One sits in her cubicle doing only what is asked of her, while the other takes advantage of educational, networking and team-building opportunities. When the project they're both working on gets downshifted from high to low priority, which one do you think will go first?