Think You May Be Losing Your Job? Eight Smart Things to Do NOW!

By Kim Dority

Change happens.

Your company is talking merger with another firm, which means your job may be in play. Your wonderful boss got promoted, only to be replaced with someone who flunked her anger management training... and she’s got her eye on you. Or you’ve heard rumors that the exciting start-up you signed on with has burned through its cash at warp speed and now job cuts may be in the works.

It’s not clear that any of these absolutely signal that your job may be in jeopardy, but the smart money is on those odds. What do you do? Hope for the best, plan for the worst, and get your exit strategy in place.

Specifically,

- **Gather up your stuff.** Figure out what resources from your current job you want to make sure you have access to - for example, the e-mail addresses of people with whom you've built relationships through your job (including vendors, if this is the case - they are often the source of great info about who's hiring), documents you've created that you want to be able to be able to reference in the future, etc. Make copies now. (Needless to say, you will not be taking any proprietary materials.)

- **Make sure your resume is in order.** If you haven’t updated it recently, check out a couple of current “how to write a resume” books from the local library, or camp out a your closest book store over your lunch hour and start perusing some of the resume books.

- **Get the word out.** Discretely let everyone in your network know you may be looking for a job, and to keep you in mind if they hear of anything.

- **Start practicing your job-hunting skills.** Figure out what job resources are out there (Monster.com is just the start) and practice using them, so if/when you need to use them, you're comfortable navigating their processes.

- **Get in touch with your school’s career center.** If your school's career center works with students and alumni, let them know that you may be “back on the market,” and determine what they can do for you. Can they connect you with potential job opportunities, help you research industries, review your cover letters and resume?

- **Research potential employers and industries.** Focus on all the different ways your skills can transfer into new job opportunities, preferably in industries that are growing. If you’re not sure how to do the research, check in with the reference librarian at your local public library.

- **Detach emotionally.** Prepare yourself emotionally for the fact that you're probably going to lose your job, and accept the fact that it's not personal, it's a business decision. Whether it's a nonprofit, a government agency, or a business, organizations have to live within budgets, and right now everybody's budgets are pretty much toast. Don't waste time or energy on being ticked off - instead, put that time and energy into starting the next phase of your career.

- **Designate a spot at home where you’ll organize your “job search” materials.** Your goal is to get organized now in case you need to launch a job search in the near future. If you wait until you do, in fact, get laid off, you'll be in an emotional state that makes it difficult to get organized, think strategically, or move forward.

Bottom line: make like a Boy Scout and be prepared. One of the worst parts of losing a job is feeling like your life is out of control. Preparing an exit strategy, even if you never need to put it in play, will help you feel – and be – in control of your destiny.