

CAREER BOOSTER



## Handling the Specter of Job Loss in the Advertising Industry

[By Surajit Sen Sharma]

Advertising professionals' jobs are among the most vulnerable in any industry. Advertising budget slashing and advertising staff reductions are common occurrences. Such actions by organizational management often leave those in advertising jobs floundering to cope with the additional workloads created by those who have left. The vicious cycle of peer job loss followed by increased workloads for survivors, reduced performances, and eventually survivor job loss plagues the advertising agency, and perceptions of impending job losses proliferate, accelerating the cycle.

Facing the specter of job loss is a key challenge for any advertising professional, and this article provides clues for surviving and thriving in a turbulent workplace. It can also help you absorb and overcome the distress of a layoff if you have already experienced job loss.

### Why an Advertising Job is More Vulnerable than Other Types of Jobs

Every morning in the world of advertising, we witness brilliant minds over 40 walking off into the sunset. Workplace ageism is a dominant trend in the advertising industry, and workers over 40 are considered "old." A 1995 survey by *American Demographics* found that the average ad agency account executive is 28, while the average corporate advertising representative is 31.1. Even as late as 2005, this trend was found to be true by Leo Bogart.<sup>2</sup> In advertising, you lose your job at 40 if you do not build and implement career strategies to handle ageism.

Advertising budget cuts are another reason for the loss of advertising jobs. Numbers are rarely valid indicators of advertising's contribution to business, and most of the methods used to quantify the organizational outcomes of other business activities are invalid for measuring the impact of

advertising. As a promotional component of marketing, advertising encounters more budget cuts than other avenues such as trade promotions. To reduce your job vulnerability, increase your perceived value to management and try to educate clients about the true value of advertising.

### What Helps When Fighting Advertising Job Vulnerability

Research shows that successful advertising professionals employ certain common strategies to increase their perceived values to their organizations and combat the inherent job vulnerability of their positions. These include:

- Educating clients that "measurability" is not the only criterion indicating a function's organizational importance
- Choosing projects or roles where the relevant functions can be easily and validly measured (e.g., media buyers)
- Leaving advertising for short periods of time to increase their competencies

- Building good track records with managers and turning them into mentors
- Making sure the right people in their organizations are aware of their contributions
- Producing the kind of results that organizations value
- Earning trust and credibility with people who are both internal and external to organizations
- Engaging in continuous and focused development of skill sets and qualifications

### What to Avoid When Trying to Prevent an Impending Job Loss

It is natural to react strongly when the prospect of job loss casts its shadow on your workplace. However, overreaction can be premature career suicide. It is important in vulnerable situations to maintain self control and avoid indulging in common reflexive reactions. Here are a few guidelines to keep in mind:

- Do not allow your fears of job loss to immobilize your thought processes.

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- Do not allow your fears of job loss to make you exaggerate your accomplishments.
- Do not give others the impression that you are adept at tasks when you are really a novice (e.g., by throwing around buzzwords, business jargon, etc.).
- Do not attempt meaningless quantification of functions that cannot be quantified just to impress.
- Avoid letting the job loss affect you more than necessary.
- View the aftermath of the job loss as a special but natural stage in your career's development.
- Set aside a period of time to grieve and be angry, followed by a time to compose yourself, before looking for other career opportunities.
- Put aside any shame or embarrassment you may feel when facing others after a job loss.

### What to Do After a Job Loss

In today's workplace, no tactic or strategy can entirely eliminate the possibility of job loss. It does hurt when you did not initiate the job loss, and you don't have a new job waiting. What really helps, though, is coming to terms with the situation and accepting the job loss as a natural part of the career development process. This means you should:

- Give yourself time to process the situation and set realistic limits regarding how much time you need.
- Clear your mind, reassess yourself and your skill sets, and look for new beginnings.
- Use your social network to uncover career openings and possibilities.
- Consider all opportunities, including transferring to other industries or job sectors.
- Start seeking career openings aggressively.

These suggestions are not new to people in advertising jobs, but we often forget what we preach under the stress of job vulnerability, knowing that a mishandled job loss situation can be very painful. On the other hand, advertising professionals who understand that losing jobs is a natural part of the career process view job losses as opportunities rather than catastrophes.

Successful people force themselves to accept the reality of job loss and do not wallow in self pity, depression, or anger. Viewing job loss properly helps advertising professionals get back on their feet quickly and move on with life. Research shows that for competent people, job losses usually lead to better opportunities that they would have completely missed out on had they not lost their jobs.

### References:

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