



FEATURE



Fighting the Vulnerability of a Human Resources Job

[By Surajit Sen Sharma]

The jobs of human resources professionals are among the most vulnerable in any industry. HR budget slashing and HR staff reductions are common occurrences. Such actions by organizational management often leave those in human resources jobs floundering to cope with the additional workloads of those who have left. The vicious cycle of peer job loss followed by increased workload for survivors followed by reduced performance followed by survivor job loss plagues the human resources department, and perceptions of job vulnerability proliferate, accelerating the cycle.

Facing job vulnerability is a key challenge for any human resources 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 HR Job is More Vulnerable Than Other Types of Jobs

It seems paradoxical that the very people who rationalize and suggest layoffs are themselves most vulnerable to job loss. The problem lies in the fact that numbers are not valid indicators of HR contribution. HR work is a staff rather than a line function, and most of the methods used to quantify the organizational outcome of other employee functions are invalid for measuring the impact of HR work. HR work doesn't have clearly visible organizational outcomes like profits, increased market share, or rising stock prices, and the result is that those in management often perceive HR work as meaningless. To reduce your job vulnerability, the real strategy is to increase your perceived value to your organization's management.

What Helps When Fighting Job Vulnerability in an HR Job

Research shows that successful human resources professionals employ certain common strategies to increase their

perceived value to their organizations and combat the inherent job vulnerability of their positions. These include:

- Educating managers to understand 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., workplace safety)
- Leaving HR for a short time to work in line jobs, such as sales or operations positions, and gaining skill sets that increase credibility with managers and other employees
- Building a good track record with a line manager and turning him or her into your mentor
- Making sure the right people in your organization are aware of your contributions
- Producing the kinds of results the organization values
- Earning trust and credibility with people who are both internal and external to the organization

- 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 when the prospect of a job loss casts its shadow on your workplace. However, overreaction can be premature career suicide. It is more important than ever 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.
- Do not allow your fears of job loss to drive you to 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 the organization.



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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 a job loss is not initiated by you, and you don't have a new job waiting. What really helps 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.
- 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 time period to grieve and be angry, followed by a time period 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.
- Clear your mind, reassess yourself and your skill sets, and look for a new beginning.
- Use your social network to uncover career openings and possibilities.
- Consider all opportunities, including moving to other industries or job sectors.
- Start seeking out career openings aggressively.

These suggestions are not new to people in human resources jobs, but we often forget what we preach under the stress of job vulnerability-and a mishandled job-loss situation can be very painful. On the other hand, human resources professionals who understand that losing one's job is a natural part of the career process view job loss as an opportunity rather than a catastrophe.

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 human resources 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.

ON THE NET

Downsizing and Layoffs
news.yahoo.com/fc/business/downsizing_and_layoffs

Laid Off: How to Make Losing Your Job a Winning Venture
www.allbusiness.com/human-resources/careers-changing-jobs/1620-1.html

Sustaining Success in Human Resources: Key Career Self-Management Strategies
www.allbusiness.com/public-administration/administration-human/4010453-1.html

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