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When Layoffs Abound, the Tough Stay Motivated

By ELIZABETH GARONE

With layoffs being announced nearly every day, it's easy to dwell on the possibility of losing your job. Employers and employees alike feel the stress of the economy, says Jennifer Burrus, a human-resources consultant with Bostonian Group, an employee-benefits consulting firm. "But the more the two sides work together, the better chance for corporate stability and job security." Experts say now is the time to find ways to help your company save money and keep it from losing ground. You'll be more valuable to your firm, but even if you are eventually laid off, you'll have something tangible to show a potential employer.

Become an IT expert. Information-technology budgets are often among the first to be cut in a tight economy, so anything you can do to lighten the IT staff's load will be appreciated. Learning how to reset your own password, checking that your virus software is up-to-date, and backing up your data via an inexpensive thumb drive (if allowed) are all easy ways to help, says David Weiss, CEO of Numara Software, a help-desk software supplier in Tampa, Fla. If you're technically inclined, Mr. Weiss suggests you "take a leadership position in helping others fix their IT problems."

Web watch. In any economy, managers have little time to stay abreast of what's going on. Employees can take an active role by reading company and industry-related blogs and RSS feeds. Report any important developments to management and if possible, offer solutions if any issues arise that affect your firm. Of course, you shouldn't spend all your time on blogs. Instead volunteer to take the lead and encourage coworkers to get involved by splitting up sources of company-related interest to be responsible for monitoring.

Become a relationship master. Eventually, projects and hiring will likely pick up at many companies. And with recruiting budgets slashed now, you can help by always being on the lookout for potential good fits for your firm or for clients. Jay Henderson, director of product marketing for Unica Corp., a Waltham, Mass., marketing-software provider, says as a help to clients and their own firm, Unica employees have taken it upon themselves to connect the newly unemployed with companies that are hiring when the fit is right. "We're brokering talent," says Mr. Henderson. "It's good for our customers, and it's good for us."

Think virtual. Many companies have clamped down on business trips, but you may be able to prove that travel isn't necessary at all. "Travel carries a huge cost, in time, money and quality of life," says Bill Dodds, vice president of sales and marketing for Virtela, a global network-solutions company in Greenwood Village, Colo. Virtela was able to replace 18 sales and marketing executive trips during each quarter of 2008 with videoconferences. If your department relies heavily on travel, research virtual meeting software and present a plan to management that shows potential cost savings.

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