

# Make Yourself Invaluable at Work

By Barbara Murry

One important signal telling you to assess your job security is being uneasy about how your superiors view your performance or the performance of your department. If you start having doubts about being in the right job or company or having all the tools or support you need to succeed, adjustments may be needed to secure your position.

If you are uneasy about your performance the first question to ask yourself is if the doubts are coming from your superiors or from you. The term "projection" describes a process where we think other people have a problem with us but in reality the problem is coming from us. For instance, let's say I've become bored with my work or am in a situation where I can't do a good job. The way the conscious mind works, if we don't have a process in place that allows us to regularly evaluate how we're doing about work, so we can solve problems, it's easy to not realize what's happening.

## **You have a problem with your job.**

You're bored or in a bad situation. You start cutting corners, do less than your best, take longer lunch hours, leave early, complain, avoid your boss—and start feeling guilty about all of this. When this happens it's easy to turn guilt into resentment. With the resentment and anxiety building up you begin defending your position to yourself and to those you trust.

Without realizing how this started (you were bored or in a bad situation), you've gotten caught up in believing your superiors have caused you to feel uneasy and insecure about your job. You begin acting differently and the people around you sense it they begin acting differently with you - and the situation spirals downward, slowly or quickly, until something is done to stop the process.

To stop this process you have to realize the problem starts with you and you have to want to fix it. Once you face this truth you need to analyze the cause of boredom or the reasons for the situation that puts you in a position of not being able to succeed. Get input from others; think about what your boss wants from you. Develop a plan to solve the problem and turn it around as quickly as you can. If the problem was boredom you may have grown and changed enough to need new challenges. The best employees find new challenges and can sell their evolving capabilities both inside and outside the company.

## Your job has a problem with you

The next scenario is that you have the skills and talent, believe you are doing your best, and enjoy your work. Yet, your superiors have problems with your performance. If this is the case ask yourself who must you satisfy and are you doing what is needed for that person? People often get into trouble because they're not sure "who's got the gold" and are doing work to please the wrong people. Stop and think carefully. Who is the person with the power to recommend you be promoted, given a raise, or fired? Who is next up the line - the person that person has to impress? How does your success or failure lead to problems for your boss with his or her boss?

### Overcoming the problem

Most bosses devote a great deal of time and energy to trying to get you focused in the right direction before giving up on you. Too often people are surprised to find out they are in trouble - and they shouldn't be surprised. The problem is a failure of communications and expectations between the boss and the employee. Usually the employee did not listen and, because the employee did not listen, he or she did not deliver what the boss was asking for. Losing your job in today's world of corporate downsizing, reengineering and mergers is certainly common and beyond your control, but losing your job because you failed to deliver what your boss wanted is usually unnecessary and always damaging, not only to you but to your profession.

### Satisfying the person who's got the gold

Whether you're starting from a position of strength or working to turn around a bad situation what really matters is that you have and keep a professional relationship with your boss.

This encourages open communication and focuses on getting the job done.

The common fundamental attributes bosses look for are:

- **Ability to communicate.** This seems obvious, but remember that good communications involves both giving and receiving. It also means selling yourself inside the organization. You need to be articulate and able to effectively communicate your ideas, both orally and in writing.
- **Analytical ability.** You must be able to examine every problem and opportunity. Identify the issue, determine the options and the consequences and, finally, provide your recommended course of action.
- **Results.** You have to produce the results your boss is looking for. Don't over promise and not deliver. And keep producing.
- **Team player.** You must be able to contribute to a group effort. This is most critical if you're in a position of not having a department or team identified. "Lone Rangers" are at risk if they do not have the support of others in the organization. Make sure you get input

from others and will not be as effective and will not have the support of other executives – a formula for a short tenure.

- **Personality.** There are few jobs where it's not important for the employee to be personable, confident, intelligent, energetic and cooperative. Further, employees must be trustworthy, maintain confidentiality, and have common sense and perspective – for setting priorities and managing crisis. Think about the employees in your organization who people turn to in a crisis. They get things done with calm and humor.
- **Driven.** Go to work every single day and produce as if your job depended upon what you did that day - because it does.
- **Visible.** Does your boss know who you are, and what you do? When managers lay off employees, unfamiliar personnel are often the first to go.

**Establish credibility.** Your credibility is extremely important. Establish yourself as an honest, hardworking, and responsible employee. Show that you can act independently and with integrity.

**Be flexible.** Can you adapt to new and different situations quickly? If not, work on being more flexible. Take a course or participate in any outside or company sponsored activity that will add to your expertise. Also, be open to new projects and additional responsibilities.

**Network.** Familiarize yourself with people outside of your department, and your company. Develop new contacts, and keep in touch with old ones -70-80% of all jobs are filled via networking.

**Image and style.** The way you dress and how you carry yourself makes a lasting impression - every day. At the very least, if you look your best at the important times - every time - you'll be in good shape. Your boss will take note.

### **Can't make it happen?**

If you can't make success happen, get out or get help. If it's the job or the organization you may need to get out. If it's something in you, help is available. Many people have personal problems that get in the way of success. If you go to an employee assistance counselor or a therapist, tell them the specifics about the problems you are having. Maybe you can't work well with other people; maybe you have an abrasive personality or can't communicate your ideas well. Maybe you get defensive and insecure. Get help figuring out the roots of the problem and the solution.

Finally, make sure you have people you could count on for help if you lose your job. Develop a network of colleagues and keep in touch! Some good books on networking are: *Dig Your Well Before You're Thirsty - The Only Networking Book You'll Ever Need* by Harvey Mackay (Doubleday) and *How to Work a Room* by Susan Roane (Harper Collins). Both of these books are available in paperback.

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