

## Layoffs: How To Predict And Survive Them – Part I

**Layoff:** *A reduction in force because of lack of work, curtailment of funds, reorganization or other reasons that are not without cause.*

Being laid off is one of the hardest tests of the workplace. The work you do in many cases becomes part of your identity and the fabric of life. When a layoff or firing happens a certain part of your life is ripped away. This can be very traumatic and may lead to negative feelings towards yourself, your former employers, and towards job searching and employment.

In some cases you show up for work on a Friday only to find that you are asked to clean out your desk and hand in your keys. To add insult to injury, you may be escorted off the premises shortly after you receive notice.

But aren't there always signs of an impending storm. Don't we see the wind picking up, or hear the thunder in the distance? Isn't there some way to prepare and anticipate a storm that is gathering?

Many events can be predicted, and even more so if you have information and facts directly from inside a company. The health and long-term strengths and weaknesses of a company will not only keep you alert to potential trouble, but also allow you to perform better on the job.

A thorough understanding of your company and its marketplace position can let you see where your job fits into the larger corporate goals and ensures that you can make decisions that will forward both your personal career plans and the company's prospects.

Keeping tabs on the company's financial position, clients and competitors demonstrates an interest in the firm that goes beyond the daily tasks of your position - a quality that managers prize, and often reward, in employees.

There are a number of signs that are used to predict overall corporate strategy and can indicate the coming storm of a layoff or bankruptcy state in a company.

- Changing job duties
- Negative news articles
- Project cancellations
- Management resignations
- Lost clients
- Departing sales staff

- Unpaid bills
- Company finances in the red
- Competitors gaining ground
- Hiring freezes
- Earning warnings
- General restructuring
- Spending warnings
- Budget cuts
- Expense reductions
- Travel cutbacks
- Restructuring
- Termination of temps and contractors
- Attrition without replacement hiring
- Reductions in support staff
- Competitors, suppliers or customers laying off

Do things like this always mean that layoffs are coming? Of course not.

Companies have seasonal and economic sales dips all the time, and are always looking for ways to improve the bottom line. So, if you see only one or two signs, it might not be a big deal. But if you see more, especially along the lines of earning warnings, budget cuts, hiring freezes, restructuring, and layoffs in your industry, it just might be time to get your resume up to date and start looking for a new job. In the meantime, it might be a good idea to cancel your vacation and implement financial measures.

Obviously, there is no one simple formula that you can use to predict your company's rise or fall. However, knowing and tracking a few benchmarks of corporate health can help you make the right career decisions and sort through office rumours for the nuggets of important information. By keeping your eyes open you will help predict and weather the rough times if layoffs occur. And together with your career plan you will be better prepared to deal with the negative feelings that are associated with losing a job.

Next week we will go into more detail explaining the various signs and how to gather information. In the meantime sit tight, and remember that management usually don't want people to find out the facts too soon, so be careful whom you divulge your suspicions of layoffs to. If you think you might get the axe soon discreetly prepare in advance. Without an escape plan you may find yourself jettisoned without a recovery plan.