

By John McKee

With unemployment rates climbing into the stratosphere and job prospects becoming increasingly tenuous, IT pros need to think strategically and act effectively to keep their heads above water. Here are some recommendations to help you safeguard your career during the months to come.

## 1 Make a specific plan

I'm not talking about making a wish list which, like New Year's resolutions, will be forgotten by the third week of January. You want a plan that has specific goals for your job (what's the best role for you next?) and your income (exactly how much would you like to be making by the end of 2009?). Writing down your plans makes them concrete, and it's more likely you will attain them.

## 2 SWOT yourself

Be honest with yourself. Review your **strengths** -- like what you've got that can move you ahead; **weaknesses** -- like those things you have or do that are holding you back; **opportunities** -- things you can pursue at the company or in the industry; and **threats** -- things that can derail you or sabotage your efforts to move ahead.

## 3 Update your resume

Smart careerists are always ready for the next opportunity. Taking time to review and modify your resume before you want to send it to someone makes it a better product. This is often your first introduction to a new employer or boss -- so make sure it's topnotch.

## 4 Invest in your career

Most people forget they really have two jobs. The first is to do what you get paid for and do it better than others. The second is to do what's required to ensure that your career isn't left to someone's wrong opinions that were made in your absence. Be in the office when your boss is. It gives you additional opportunity to let him or her get to know you for things other than the job you're currently filling.

## 5 Get financially smart

Get involved with managing your financial affairs. Paying attention to money matters is one of the smartest and easiest ways to improve your personal balance sheet. There are many books and online courses on the subject of money management basics. Looking after your financial health doesn't take a lot of time; but it could save your life.

## 6 Develop a sense of urgency

Many people think that working hard, being busy, and burning a lot of energy is equal to managing their career and life. It's not. Developing a sense of urgency means knowing how to pick through all those "to-do's" and focusing your time and energy on just the ones that count.

## 7 Look up, not down

When downsizing is the operative word, developing your team is no longer the smartest way to ensure success. Spend less time with your staff members and more time looking after your boss' needs. When you show that you're working hard to make him or her look good, you'll stand out from the crowd. And your boss will be more likely to provide you with the resources that you and your team need to do the job better.

## 8 Update your skill set

It commonly pays to demonstrate that you are interested in "upgrading" yourself -- and in 2009, your ability to grow may be more important than ever. With unemployment now at record highs, demand for jobs greatly exceeds supply. Not staying on par with colleagues and those vying for your job will be a death knell. Take seminars, do coursework, or leverage other vehicles to get on the leading edge and thus, maximize your personal value to the organization.

## 9 Self promote

Face it: Often, decisions are made affecting who gets moved upward and who gets downsized without your involvement. It's important that the decision makers know you and what you are doing. Have regular meetings with your boss or send regular e-mails to update those in charge about your contributions.

## 10 Look after your loved ones

One way or another, when 2009 is done and over, you'll still be here and you're going to want those you care about to still be with you. While it's important to look after your job and career, don't neglect those who make life most worthwhile. Tell them you care and spend time with them "just for fun."

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## Version history

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