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Ready yourself for newsroom cuts:The eight "Rs" of preparation for these uncertain times

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Ready yourself for newsroom cuts

The eight "Rs" of preparation for these uncertain times

One really cannot escape the reality: Newspaper and magazine industries are shrinking.

Layoffs and buyouts are frequent occurrences. We see it in headlines, coast to coast. We hear from colleagues. Sometimes, we experience it ourselves. So, what if you are presented a pink slip? What are you to do?

If the day comes and you are on the list to go, here are some "Rs" to help you through this time.

Readiness

First and most importantly, move to a state of readiness — now! Pretending that you are safe is not a smart move. No one is exempt. Take a look at your personal situation, your financial obligations and financial planning. Determine what steps you need to make to maintain your life. Some easy, important and immediate steps to take: accelerate your savings; pay off debts; work with a financial planner to help you make moves that will save you from big mistakes; and look for other ways to create income.

Restraint

Don't fall apart emotionally, at least publicly. Hold it together until you can react privately. This is not the time to blame your company or yourself. Remember, layoffs and buyouts are not personal attacks.

It's just business. Do not do anything that would damage your reputation as you make your exit.

Review

Review the severance package you have received. Severance packages are negotiable, especially if you are one of a few employees who was handed a package, have been with the company for a while and may have difficulty landing another position elsewhere. If you are part of a larger group, the negotiation could be more difficult or nearly impossible.

In reviewing your package, the Five O'Clock Club, a career counseling group, suggests these steps: look at each item separately: cash, benefits, career counseling and so on; decide what you need and want.

Relax

If you have the luxury of taking some time off, do so. One talented journalist was caught up in downsizing at a major metropolitan newspaper. He was one of the first to go when his beat was eliminated. Fortunately, he was able to travel for about six months and relocate to the region where he grew up. He then started his job search, networking with people far and wide.

Earlier this year, he was able to take his skills to the "most stable employer in town," the federal government. In his current role, he writes speeches, edits Web sites and publications, helps prepare news releases and handles other communications responsibilities.

Reflect

This is a great opportunity to review your life, personally and professionally, and make adjustments. A layoff or buyout gives you an opportunity to reflect upon your personal values and your desire to live a life that reflects your choices.

Reassess

With the knowledge you've gained from self-reflection, take time to reassess your work life. Look closely at the last job you held. Did you love it? If so, what parts of your job did you like best? What did you like least about your job?

Repackage

Repackaging yourself is all about presenting yourself and your knowledge, skills and abilities in a fresh and interesting way. That repackaging can be seen in your resume.

Particularly if you plan to explore other fields, emphasize the knowledge and skills you have and what your accomplishments have been over the years. In other words, focus on your transferable skills: research and communication skills, writing, editing and more.

Reach out

Networking with others is one way to make it through a difficult time. Isolation is a mistake. But remember, networking should not be all about "me, me, me." That approach is a real turnoff. Be interested in learning about other people. Listen to what they are saying. Hopefully, they know this principle too and will listen to you. ❖

Commentary by

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