

'Laying low' is a good way to be out of a job

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Lee Miller/The Star-Ledger

Celeste White of Devlin Communications writes: "Being recently fired, I would say, looking back, the way to survive is to lay low. I would advise employees that are currently employed to, shut your mouth, do the minimum amount of work possible and whatever you do, don't shine. Be wallpaper, those are the ones that survive in the workplace."

Some career experts share Celeste's basic view that the way to survive at work when times are tough is to keep your head down, do your job and try not to draw attention to yourself.

Andrew J. O'Connor III, president of Parsippany-based outplacement firm A. J. O'Connor Associates, takes issue with that advice: "The majority of individuals we work with are victims of organizational restructuring, resulting from cost containment, mergers and acquisitions or office/plant closings. Contrary to what you might think, job loss today is seldom the result of poor performance.

"Given that an organization's needs are always changing, our advice to individuals is to continually find ways to add value by looking for opportunities to take on new projects, maintain and enhance skill sets and develop a range of experiences in different roles laterally — not just vertically. Job security is unlikely to be within an individual's control, but staying marketable and maintaining your network are your best backup plans."

Merely doing your job well and providing value for your employer, though, may not be enough these days to assure career success. Not only must you perform well, but it is also essential to make sure the right people are aware of your successes. Jay Jessup, author of "Fame 101," advises individuals to focus on enhancing their visibility in good times, as well as bad times.

He notes: "The top 1 percent of every industry or profession have a movie star's inherent agility with powerful branding and celebrity-level publicity. Any company or business leader is wise to get very visible

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He notes: "The top 1 percent of every industry or profession have a movie star's inherent agility with powerful branding and celebrity-level publicity. Any company or business leader is wise to get very visible when times are tough because the leaders of every sector still do well, while the rest get lost in the clutter. Head down? Never.”

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With the economy improving, although at a relatively slow pace, the question arises: Is this the moment to make a special effort to stand out in anticipation of the opportunities that will open up as the economy continues to expand? Many of the career experts I have spoken with advise you do exactly that.

Promoting yourself and your successes in the right way can be a ticket to a promotion

or a better job. Being visible is important internally where you work, so when an opportunity arises, the decision makers charged with filling that opening are aware of you and why you merit consideration.

Externally it is necessary because more and more recruiters are using the internet to seek out candidates who are currently employed and not actively looking for a new position. If those recruiters cannot find out about your accomplishments on the web, great jobs for which you might be well suited are likely to pass you by.

Beyond just doing an outstanding job, what can you do to stand out? Mark Jeffries, author of the soon-to-be-released "The Art of Business Seduction," suggests the following as ways to stand out both at your current company and in the broader business community:

- Communicate frequently.
- Use the internet. Share business ideas or personal tips online through Twitter, Linked-In and Facebook. This will enhance your image as a "published thought leader."
- Reach out to old work contacts to "catch up" and "brainstorm." While you are helping them you are also putting yourself back on their radar screen.
- Actively network.

While standing out will help propel your career forward, it is also important to be seen as a team player. General Stanley Chrystal, until this week the top U.S. commander in Afghanistan with an outstanding record of military successes, found this out the hard way when he was forced to resign after Rolling Stone magazine published remarks he allegedly made that were critical of members of the administration.

No matter how talented you are, once the people around you lose confidence in your loyalty, you can no longer be effective. So while you are standing out, be sure to share credit with the people around you that have helped you achieve your success. ■