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Four signs your job is in danger

Recruitment firms give tips on how to save your job, and what to do if you are laid off

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AS THE economic downturn deepens and companies continue to cut back, workers are getting increasingly jittery about whether they will be the next in line for the chopping block.

The pace of layoffs is still fairly moderate but it may pick up in the coming months, say economists.

So how do you know if you are on the road to being axed? We polled recruitment firms for some key signs to look out for that may mean your job is in jeopardy.

1. Your company is performing poorly and plans to institute, or has already implemented, cost-cutting measures.

It may start with the little things like saving electricity, but if more weighty steps are needed, salaries may be shaved and jobs may have to go, say experts.

"That e-mail that announces the need to reduce costs could be a tip-off that staff expenses are also being considered for cuts," says recruitment firm Robert Half.

Mr Josh Goh, senior manager of corporate services at human resource consultancy GMP Group, agrees: "If the company's finances are in the red and there is a high possibility that the management might turn to drastic cost-cutting measures to save the business, it is highly likely that jobs would get cut."

2. Your company has merged with, acquired or been bought by another firm.

The recession is shaking up industries and firms are beginning to consolidate.

A merger or acquisition may not necessarily lead to job cuts, but changes will almost certainly be made as there will probably be duplication of jobs and departments, says Mr Goh.

3. Your workload is lighter than usual or projects are shared with or transferred to other colleagues.

One of the top signs of imminent job loss is when “your span of control is shrinking”, Mr Goh says.

“You might find yourself with nothing to do while your colleagues are busy. You are also not given any projects or your responsibilities are split with or transferred to another colleague.”

If you have less work to do than normal, it could indicate that there is not enough work to justify the number of employees in the company, or that the firm is redistributing work in anticipation of staff cuts, says Robert Half.

It added that employees whose work is cyclical in nature and who have significant periods of slow time may also be in more danger, as companies trimming expenses tend to focus on departments or positions with cyclical work that could be supported by fewer workers.

4. You are left out of company memos, notices, e-mail messages and meetings.

If you are suddenly excluded from meetings to which your peers are invited, or you are no longer included in meetings in which you used to participate, it could be a danger signal, says Robert Half.

“When a company is preparing to retrench employees, it may not include them in strategy sessions or other meetings because it feels it is unnecessary.”

Finding yourself out of the loop of companywide notices and important e-mail messages may also mean a layoff in the near future, says Mr Goh.

Colleagues avoiding you or treating you differently could also be a sign that they know something that you don't.

IF YOU recognise just one or two of these signs in your workplace, it may not be too worrying.

But if you start to see more signs emerge amid growing talk of layoffs, you may seriously be in danger of losing your job. Here are some things you can do:

Do not be paranoid or so consumed with worry that your work suffers. Avoid a meltdown and try to stay positive.

“If there is a possibility that your job is on the line, it is important to remain professional, positive and proactive,” says Mr Tim Hird, managing director of Robert Half.

“A reputation for professionalism and good work ethics is your most important career asset as it will help to enhance your chances of getting a new job, or even be rehired by your company when business picks up again.”

Mr Declan O’Sullivan, founder and director of recruitment firm Kerry Consulting, also suggests reaching out more to the people around you at work.

“Quite often, when people get stressed, they tend to curl up into a ball and hope the problem will go away, which is not useful,” he says.

“A far better survival strategy would be to go out of your way and talk to people, be more outgoing, and engage your colleagues and business partners.”

He adds that during crunch times, it is important to be seen to work hard. “Psychologically, someone who works late is less likely to be let off than someone who leaves at 5pm sharp every day.”

Be proactive in showing that you are valuable to the company.

Volunteering for extra work and demonstrating your ability to multitask and learn new things can improve your chances of being retained, says Ms Andrea Ross, managing director of recruitment consultancy Robert Walters Singapore.

“Sometimes, you may have a situation where one area of the firm is seeking to reduce costs but other parts of the business may be still growing, opening up new opportunities for existing staff whose skills are transferrable.”

Ensure you are financially prepared to lose your job.

In the worst-case scenario where retrenchment is unavoidable, it is essential to ensure that you have enough set aside to do without a job for a while.

Even better, grow alternative sources of income outside of work by picking up a skill or a hobby that can be monetised, say recruitment specialists.

In training-obsessed Singapore, there is an endless variety of classes you can take to learn new skills - from building spreadsheets to freelance Web or graphic design - and put them to practical use.

Start looking around and networking.

It is always helpful to have a good relationship with a headhunter at any time, but especially when you feel your job is in danger, says Mr O'Sullivan.

Networking should also be part of your daily business life, he adds. Never miss an opportunity to connect with a good contact - and potential job provider.

"The usual advice applies: Be polite and timely, keep your CV updated and make sure it is really accurate and well thought-out."

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