

Career Advancement in Uncertain Times

By Kirrin Coleman

In times like these, things have a way of coming into focus. A lean job market won't necessarily reveal anything new about how to succeed professionally, but it's a great reminder about which tactics and practices are absolutely essential. It's no wonder, then, that executives and advisors from all sectors are telling us that it's time to get back to basics and think tactically about career advancement.

Let's cut to the chase: If you want to succeed in your organization, you have to be the employee they cannot afford to lose. Or, if you're just entering the job market, you need to be the interviewee they cannot afford not to hire. Period.

Sure, we can tell you about dressing for success, networking within the organization, and attending the holiday party. But what a company needs at the most basic level is not well-dressed, well-liked, and respected employees. A company needs to reduce operational costs and increase revenue. When you think tactically, you'll see that you've got two basic objectives: 1) Help the organization reduce costs and/or increase revenue, and 2) Market yourself as essential to reducing costs and/or increasing revenue.

To achieve the first objective, be a Swiss Army knife: multi-functional and indispensable. Organizations are looking for how they can minimize overhead and maximize output. They want efficiency. And the more blades and gizmos you provide, the more necessary you'll be. What can you do now to increase your range? Are you able to handle cross-departmental functions?

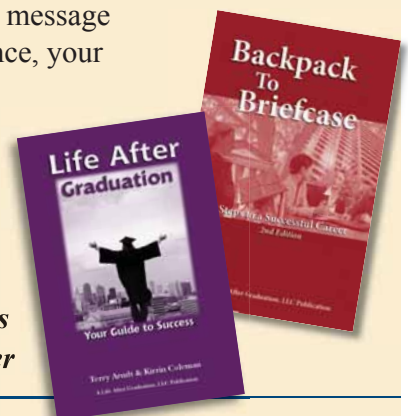
One way to become indispensable is to take the initiative. This is a valuable trait in anybody, in any kind of financial climate, and it's absolutely critical now. Find and recommend solutions before you're asked to do so. According to *Life After Graduation*, if you're new to the organization, one great way to demonstrate your willingness to work hard as well as your yet-to-be-fully-revealed capabilities is to volunteer for projects, committees, and additional training. These efforts could mean taking on significant projects—rewriting a computer program, for instance, or creating a style manual—or even offering assistance with the little tasks that aren't glamorous but simply need to get done, like binding a report or running copies. Taking the initiative in a variety of ways will develop your skills, establish strong and productive relationships with supervisors and colleagues, and help you learn more about where you work. And, of course, it helps your organization reduce costs and increase revenue.

Which brings us to that second objective: Market yourself. You're versatile! You're creative! You leap departments in a single bound! You can write code *and* copy! Now, spread the word. It's not always necessary to increase your range—but it is critical to inform your employer about the many skills and talents you already possess. Don't stop promoting yourself just because the interview is over. You need to be visible, an active voice in the company.

The marketing message is simple: This organization needs me. You can convey this message in many ways, but the most effective method is to *show* it. Show it with your presence, your effectiveness in a variety of situations, and with data related to your performance.

So, whether you're on the verge of entering the job market or you're already there, keep in mind these fundamentals about career advancement. It's a challenging time, but a great one to hone basic strategies and modes of operating that will become the foundation of a successful career.

For more career tips, read *Life After Graduation: Your Guide to Success* or *Backpack To Briefcase: Steps to a Successful Career*



Kirrin Coleman is the co-author of *Life After Graduation: Your Guide to Success*

