

5 keys to advancing your career during difficult economic times

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Joel Garfinkle is recognized as one of the top 50 coaches in the U.S., having worked with many of the world's leading companies, including Oracle, Google, Amazon, Deloitte and Ritz-Carlton. He is the author of seven books, including "Getting Ahead: Three Steps to Take Your Career to the Next Level." View his books and free articles at his [Executive Coaching Services](#) website.



A recent survey by the American Psychological Association reported that there is a significant degree of worker discontent in organizations of all sizes. Forty-three percent reported being particularly dissatisfied with the limited opportunities for professional development and career advancement within their current firm.

However, in these difficult economic times with significant company downsizing and layoffs, employees need to readjust their expectations and understand that a proactive mindset should replace a passive wait-and-see attitude to advance. Below we discuss five creative strategies that will get management's attention and foster your professional growth.

1. Speak up and be heard

Actively participate in all office meetings and demonstrate your interest by reviewing the agenda beforehand so that you come prepared with speaking notes. Don't just talk so that you can hear yourself but add value to the discussion by providing innovative solutions to current challenges.

You also want to position yourself strategically since where you sit is almost as important as what you say. Choosing a seat near management will ensure you are heard while also subtly showing your support for company leadership.

2. Go the extra mile

Another way to be noticed is to assist colleagues with their work, even if it's outside the realm of your responsibilities. For example, you may volunteer to facilitate part of a new staff orientation, mentor a student intern or help organize a company retreat.

While each activity may necessitate working extra hours, know that the effort may well be worth it when it gets the attention of company leadership. However, do not be self-serving with eyes only on the prize; when we enjoy the work for its own sake, the benefits come as a natural byproduct.

3. Engage with other employees

Many studies have found that socialization at work leads to increased productivity as it fosters team-building and an environment of collegiality. Go out of your way to welcome new employees, participate in all training offered by the firm, coordinate a dinner outing with employees in your department and attend company-sponsored events.

Not only will these activities make work more enjoyable, but they are also great networking opportunities that will help you develop important new connections within your company.

4. Become an "intrapreneur"

If you have an entrepreneurial streak but want the security of steady employment, consider ways to help your company penetrate new markets by either expanding its product/service line or its target niche. Volunteer to spearhead this effort, and when it is successful you will be right in line to lead the new division.

5. Choose a mentor

A 2010 study by Catalyst found that mentoring by senior executives can help employees advance up the career ladder. A mentor is someone to whom you can turn when presented with new challenges at work. They are able to provide guidance and support so that you are able to successfully address new challenges.

Think strategically about your long-range career goals, and then choose a mentor who can best help you advance in that direction. For example, if you wish to make a lateral advance into a different department, choose a mentor who works at the managerial level in that department not a senior executive within your current division.



Joel Garfinkle