

# Career Ladder

[BY MICHAEL A. REGAN]

## Get some career insurance

**HAVE YOU DONE ANYTHING RECENTLY TO PROTECT YOUR CAREER** in the event of a catastrophe? In other words, do you have “career insurance” in case the unexpected occurs, and you find yourself suddenly in need of a new job? By “career insurance,” I mean taking steps that will improve your chances of finding and getting that new job.

We all know that in the corporate world, layoffs and firings are a fact of life. Yet surprisingly few people recognize that there is a) a distinct possibility that their jobs are at risk, and b) a need to be continually “purchasing” career insurance.

How do you insure your career?

First, expand your network of personal and professional contacts. Consider joining two worthwhile business organizations—one that is industry-specific and another that is a general business organization—and, most importantly, show up and get involved.

Because I serve on the boards of several national transportation and logistics organizations and am active in several other industry groups, I have valid information regarding the number of current members in each organization. It’s a very depressing number. If you add up all of the members of groups such as CSCMP, you’ll learn that less than 15 percent of professionals in our industry belong to at least one professional or trade association. And if you look at the number of individuals who actually show up and get involved, that number drops to less than 5 percent. In other words, more than 95 percent of supply chain professionals are ignoring the importance of developing a network of associates they can turn to for help when the unexpected occurs.

Second, work on enhancing your professional capabilities. Years ago, a distinguished academic stated that if you don’t invest at least 300 to 400 hours per year in continuing education activities, you run the risk of becoming unmarketable in three to five years. So if you’re interested in insuring your career, make a commitment to continuing education.

When I mention these suggestions, people often tell me, “I don’t have time to network or take class-

es.” My response: We all have the same amount of time, 24 hours in a day. So the issue isn’t time; it’s priorities! I meet people who tell me they don’t have time for continuing education, but they can tell me what’s happened on their favorite television show or with their favorite sport teams. We make time for the things that are important to us.

Years ago I received a call from a very nice person who was the director of logistics for a good-sized company and had been laid off. His termination caught him by surprise. Here was a man in his mid-fifties who, despite having received great performance evaluations, had few job prospects. What did his professional net-

work look like? He belonged to one professional association, but he hadn’t attended a single event in several years. So now, in his moment of need, his network basically consisted of carrier sales representatives and former suppliers. He told me with a sense of regret, “I was always too busy to take time for myself.” If he had taken the time to expand his network and skill set, he might have had better prospects.

Here is some advice for you. Just as the best time to buy life insurance is before you die, the best time to get career insurance is before you lose your job. So all you hard-working types who are giving your company 110 percent to the point of ignoring your own career development—wake up! You’re taking a big risk! Your company will take as much as you want to give and more. When you lose your job, they’ll say nice things and (maybe) give you a severance package and a spiffy watch. But one thing they won’t do is buy insurance for your career. You’re the only one who can make that “purchase.” △

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