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Always Be Ready For a Sudden Layoff

Nothing is permanent, especially your job. Waves of layoffs occur even in the best economy, and at certain times of the year.

There are some clues when a layoff is coming: You're no longer being invited to the meetings you always were part of. Executive office doors are closed and blinds are shut while long meetings take place. Company finances aren't great, and everyone looks worried. There have been cutbacks in spending. People aren't talking over their cube walls like before, and instead are using conference rooms. Others are having "lunch" in their cars or down the block at the coffee shop so they can talk to possible other employers or network contacts or recruiters. New projects are on hold, including a few that you were slated to lead.

All of these are red flags that there will likely be cuts, and you may be one of them.

Are you prepared? Most people are not, hoping they are misreading the cues OR they're just not seeing them at all.

Here are 8 things to do if you suspect you may be let go soon. I'm putting them down here with the scenario in mind that with the red flags above, and that you may be called to HR at any moment:

- Be sure you have **your contacts** in your own database on your personal computer or phone, and not only on the company's computer or phone. And speaking of phones, make sure you have your own smart phone and not just "the company's", or if you're laid off you will suddenly be without *any*—and no place for the data you already have. Don't lose it, move it.
- Make sure **your LinkedIn profile belongs to YOU** and not your company. You don't want to go into it for your contacts and learn that your password has been changed. If your company is paying for your LinkedIn membership, change it to *you* paying for it.
- This also goes for any use of any **social media**, such as Facebook, Twitter, etc., if you've been using it for company business. Have a separate, personal presence there with your own identity. And it goes without saying that *any* posts to social media under your name should be SFW (safe for work).
- **Take photos of yourself** on the job. This may sound odd but later the photos will be useful in, for example, showing you leading a project planning meeting or presenting to company executives. Posting photos in social media during a job search shows you in context with the rest of your team or department, even if you're no longer there. With the emphasis on images, the saying "A picture is worth 1,000 words", has never been truer.
- Have any samples of work on **your personal computer**, not just on your work computer. Be sure to have copies of **complex marketing plans, presentations or similar work** that you have created, on your computer at home. It's not that you will give these away to some other company, it's just that these are very hard to reconstruct when one day you'll want to do one for someone else.
- Be sure to have any great **performance reviews** stored on your personal laptop. If they are in hard copy only, be sure to have copies at home.
- Always keep **your resume** and **LinkedIn** up to date. Treat these as a log of achievements; don't let them sit untouched year after year or it will be misery for you to update them when you need to start a search. These are *career management* tools, not just job search tools.
- In the same way, **don't stop networking** when you're IN a job or you'll have to rebuild your network when you are possibly at your most vulnerable: when you're laid off. So keep that up, and catch up if you need to, *now*.

Obviously, *do not* do anything to harm your company or its systems. Don't take anything that doesn't belong to you, and don't take proprietary information.

Don't be one of the folks who thinks a layoff won't happen to them so that they're painfully unprepared. Don't be called into HR, only to be escorted back to your desk where they wait for you to get only your purse or wallet, and photos from the cube walls, unable to touch your computer again or go into any files. It's bad enough to be let go without having to worry about all of these things as well -- so be ready. Now.