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# Executive **EDGE**

## **SURVIVING DOWNSIZING**

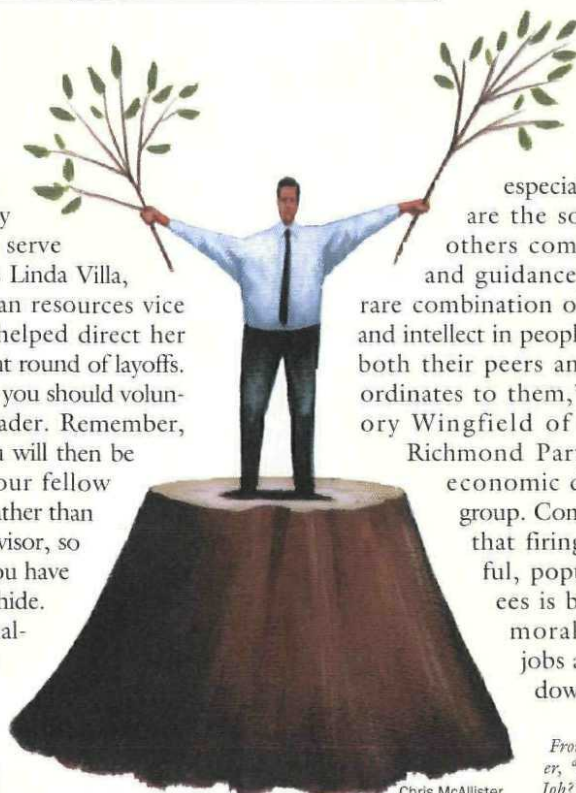
Downsizing will be an economic fact of life for years to come, according to many experts. You probably cannot avoid it, but you may survive it if you plan ahead.

First, take a look at the economic health of your industry and your company. "Focus on your business as an investor would," says John Berg, a vice president for human resources at Montefiore Medical Center in New York City. If trouble is coming for your business, it is probably coming for you as well.

Then, inventory your own skills. Do you bring something of value to your company and its customers? If the answer is yes, do they know it? If they do not, your job may not be secure even if your services are valuable. Tom Quinn, who lost his position as director of financial services at Ryder Airline Services in Dallas, says, "Unless you are out there continually promoting yourself, you will be vulnerable."

"You should seek out any opportunity to serve on a team," says Linda Villa, an AT&T human resources vice president who helped direct her firm's most recent round of layoffs. Once on a team, you should volunteer to be its leader. Remember, though, that you will then be evaluated by your fellow team members rather than by a single supervisor, so any bad habits you have will be harder to hide.

In the final analysis, you can best protect your job by being liked by your boss and co-workers. This is



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especially true if you are the sort to whom others come for advice and guidance. "There's a rare combination of personality and intellect in people who attract both their peers and their subordinates to them," says Gregory Wingfield of the Greater Richmond Partnership, an economic development group. Companies know that firing wise, helpful, popular employees is bad for office morale, so their jobs are practically downsize-proof.

*From Ronald B. Lieber, "How Safe Is Your Job?" Fortune, April 1, 1996, pp. 72-80.*

## **Rx: COMMUNICATION SKILLS**

To be successful, the manager of a medical practice must foster trust and cooperation among employees. For that, the manager needs good communication skills.

Physicians often lack these skills, write Roger Reid and Alys Novak in their book, *User-Friendly Psychology for Managing Your Medical Practice*. Because physicians are trained to save lives, they naturally feel godlike, say the authors. Expert in one field, doctors tend to behave as though they were experts in all others. Such egotism is unlikely to generate an atmosphere of cooperation and trust.

Reid and Novak urge physician-managers to cease being experts and instead become communicators, a role that requires some humility. Marty Kiernan, MD, a manager at the Saint Joseph Hospital Family Practice Center in Denver, agrees. "I don't know" has to be an allowed phrase in your medical practice," he says. "That's the only way to get through life as a family physician, and that also happens to be the best way to be a good practice administrator."

Kiernan runs Saint Joseph's family practice residency program in partnership with Roger Corbman, a nonphysician administrator who also believes strongly in communication.

"Give employees much more input than they've had before," he says. "Then they will buy in and work to accomplish the goals of the practice. If it's the other way around, you'll have a hard time accomplishing your goals."

Whether the manager is a physician or not, he or she needs to have a mutually respectful relationship with the practice's doctors. "One key is getting the suit [manager] to be able to walk up to the white coat [physician] and say, 'I've got something to tell you,'" says Kiernan "—and getting the white coat to be able to walk up to the suit and say, 'I don't know something.'"

Bobbi Bolin, a nurse with experience in accounting, is administrator of the five-physician Rocky Mountain Cancer Centers in Colorado Springs, CO. Bolin convenes weekly meetings to keep communication among the practice's members flowing. She says she has no problems with physicians' egos. "You have to be real confident in what you're presenting to doctors, and I think I am," she says.

*From Bill Clements, "The Care and Feeding of Your Staff," American Medical News, April 22-29, 1996, pp. 11-12.*