

Your Employee and Family Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Rising above a downturn: staying focused on the job

Recent economic fluctuations have changed the way we work. All around people in organizations are changing roles, seeking new career paths and adjusting to the fact that they may no longer be able to depend on the illusive “job for life.”

If your workplace has not yet felt the financial effects of a slumping economy, it might still be braced for the impact. For some organizations, tension and fear in the workplace can lead to an emotionally "toxic" environment, while for others, it can present the opportunity for workers to join forces and rise to the occasion, brainstorming and bonding their way out of a financial rut.

Understanding how organizations behave in tense times, can not only help you ride out the storm, but can also direct you and your team to calmer, more productive waters.

Conversation vs. Gossip

If you work anywhere that employs more than one person, there will be conversation. It is a very natural way to relax and share at work. Men and women alike take time out of their work day to speak about other people’s lives. This can be a positive release and an excellent way to gain perspective over your own problems.

Communication during a time where your job may feel threatened, however, can turn towards gossip. A co-worker’s shortcomings or personal business can be exposed in an offhanded remark or a defensive reaction when you’re feeling threatened. This kind of talk is not harmless chatter, and can lead to employees ganging up on each other. Remember: while economy swings and the tension they create may be temporary, the reputation you earn at work can be permanent. Participation in this kind of behaviour not only reflects poorly on your character, it can also be taxing on your physical and mental health.

If someone shares work or life details with you in confidence, don’t pass on the information to others. And if the top gossip regularly dishes you the latest dirt on your co-workers, resist the temptation to take his or her "bait." Instead, try changing the subject to work-related matters or, apologizing and excusing yourself from the conversation. If the gossip persists, you may have to be more straightforward (and polite of course) about not finding the rumour mill very productive.

Competition

During a downturn, many people can feel as if they need to work against their colleagues to impress their employer. Some may feel pressured to work even harder as the threat of layoffs sets in.

Competition can be healthy or hostile, depending on its intent. If the environment at work is toxic, your confidence will suffer. Participating in unhealthy competition will only negatively impact the atmosphere of a place you spend most of your time. Facing this level of tension everyday at work can result in troubles with focusing or making decisions, changes in sleeping habits, increased fatigue, and a loss of motivation.

If you feel anxious, uneasy or are experiencing any of the symptoms above, consider sharing your

concerns with a trusted friend or loved one.

Creativity

Remember in grade school when you were given a few objects, and told to create something that worked? There was an amazing energy that surrounded such projects.

The harsh realities of economically tough times can actually be a great opportunity to use your imagination and resources in new ways. Brainstorming with colleagues to develop new, cost-effective solutions to old problems can not only encourage everyone to employ their strengths, but can also help people bond as a team. Experts suggest organizations that take time during an economic downturn to re-group, look for innovative ways of doing business, and stay focused on long-term goals, can often emerge from a depressed economy even stronger.

Come together in a positive, productive way. Take pride in your work, and you will bring that confidence home with you at the end of the day.

Lunch is the Spice of Life

Combat office politics by changing your lunch habits. Break bread with someone new. Office cliques are inevitable, but by putting yourself out there as an open-minded person you will start to create an atmosphere of camaraderie. Getting to know everyone at work will help break up the monotony, and lift your mood. And you never know when those connections will come in handy down the road.

Let new experiences and alliances become your lunchtime activity. Not only will it help your reputation at work, it will also aid in digestion!

Rise to the Recession

Gossip and unhealthy competition have no place in a true teamwork environment. Recognizing a downturn as an opportunity for you and your co-workers to become more efficient and creative will help you remain focused at work, healthy at home, and proud of who you are.

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