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Friday, 01 June 2012 14:24

I recently received an email from an individual working in a maintenance department as a “Lube Technician.” He had heard that he was a primary candidate for a first round of corporate layoffs. With no early-retirement option available to him, and no trade certificate or formal education to fall back on, this guy was feeling extremely vulnerable. He wanted advice on how he could prepare himself and present his strengths to a prospective employer.

Regardless of the ups and downs in the economy, we all must realize that involuntary unemployment is a possibility for anyone in today’s workforce—*even those in the critical maintenance and reliability arena*
. Preparing for this type of life-changing experience while you have a job could make it easier to deal with being laid off should it ever happen to you.

Be proactive. Once you come to grips with the idea that you *could* lose your job some day, open your mind and “reframe” how you view your current situation. Taking the following steps will strengthen your position in any job market.

1. Embrace a different mindset, one that lets you think of yourself as self-employed, and commit to executing all future work as if you were being paid on your performance.

2. Remember that potential employees are more interested in “how” YOU personally made a difference in a past position, rather than what YOU “did.” Think back and document suggestions you’ve made that have benefitted your organization/company, and write up a case study for each instance. In the meantime, start a diary of work performed, record any innovative approach or suggestion for improvement you’ve made and chronicle your successes. If you are, in fact, laid off, and your ideas have been used to benefit your former employer, ask your former supervisor for a job reference based on these successes.

3. Subscribe to industry publications (like *LMT* and *Maintenance Technology,* for example) to keep up-to-date on new technologies, philosophies and tools used in your type of work and industry sector. Try to visit local (but relevant) trade shows and conferences. If your company won't let you go on work-time, consider doing so before or after your work day. I've met many people at these types of events who have used vacation time and paid for their entrance fees—*viewing this approach as an important investment in themselves (refer to the title of this column)*
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4. Upgrade your professional credentials ASAP. I encouraged my "Lube Technician" correspondent to invest in the domain-of-knowledge library(ies) for the International Council for Machinery Lubrication (ICML) and/or Society for Maintenance & Reliability Professionals (SMRP) and pursue certification as a Machinery Lubrication Technician (MLT) or Machinery Lubrication Analyst (MLA) through ICML, or as a Certified Maintenance & Reliability Professional (CMRP) through SMRP.

5. Prepare (or update) a professional resume that highlights what makes YOU different and more hireable than everybody else who might be looking for your desired job.

Understanding the worth of your contribution to your current employer is paramount to understanding yourself. Realizing how you have made a difference can give you a degree of self-esteem and confidence that sets you apart in a job interview (if you ever find yourself in one). Regardless of your situation today, investing in yourself via the above steps will make you a more valuable employee, with a brighter future—*wherever you are*. Good Luck! **LMT**

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