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You, Inc.: 22 Ways You Can Show Your
Value in Today's Cutthroat Corporate World

For many companies these days, business isn't exactly booming. If you've been spending your days worrying about when your head might be on the chopping block, it's time to stop. Instead you should focus on You, Inc., the only business you can truly control, and here's some advice on how you can do just that.

By Blaine Loomer

It hangs over many cubicles in today's business world. It turns once happy—or at least bearable—workplaces into the place where happy thoughts and laughter go to die. It makes once friendly colleagues turn on each other, abandoning all goodwill in attempts to look out for number one. “It” is the lay-off threat. The ax. The unpleasant end that pretty much every employee is trying to avoid at a time when the unemployment rate is above 10 percent.

It's time to cut the crap. It's time to stop worrying about what you can't control and take a look in the mirror to re-assess the company in which you are CEO, CFO, and everything in between—You, Inc.

The best way to keep your job in today's economy is to be so valuable to your employers that they simply can't do without you. Unfortunately, there is a lot of BS to get caught up in these days. If you want to keep your job, though, you absolutely must steer clear of it.

I know what I'm talking about. I wrote my new book, *Corporate Bullsh*t: A Survival Guide* (Mitchell Publishers Inc., 2009, ISBN: 978-0-9842016-0-0, \$29.50) to help the good guys and gals understand what is going on in today's corporate world, so they can better maneuver around the BS they'll encounter during their careers.

Here is some advice for anyone out there who wants to know how they can get ahead in such a treacherous employment environment:

Be a part of the bottom line. If you want to be valuable to your company, then you need to contribute to its bottom line. In other words, you need to help it make money. Otherwise, it's not worth it to your company to keep you around. Make a concerted effort to connect to what it is that makes your company money, and focus on the talents and skills that you have that will

contribute to those things. The company measures its ROI on you so you should measure the ROI on yourself as well. None of us has time to do everything, so we are faced with the trade-off every day. Focus on those items that use your time and resources most effectively so that you connect back to the bottom line.

Avoid your office troublemakers. Often there are no greater timewasters in the workplace than your fellow colleagues. There are the colleagues who love to gossip and spread rumors. The colleagues who are constantly trying to catch your mistakes. The office flirt who will only get you in trouble. And the bad news bear who doesn't want to do anything but bring you down with bad news. The best way to deal with these kinds of colleagues is to avoid them like the plague. Keep an eye on them, but keep your distance. They will only waste your time, frustrate you, and cause you problems.

Remember that time is money. The most valuable commodity you have is your own time. Spend it wisely. For example, don't invest eight hours in putting together a presentation when you can deliver the same results with only an hour's prep time. Management wants the content of your message, not a bunch of fluff and pretty artwork.

Countless times, I have seen a presenter cut short and her ideas not even considered because the managers ran out of time before she got to the meat of her idea. Define your core competency and stick with it. If you try to do everyone else's jobs, you won't be able to do your own. You, Inc., will suffer.

Don't be afraid to abandon ship. Be flexible when it comes to your career path, even if it means changing careers midstream. Some of the most successful people I know are following a much different career path now than they set out to in the beginning. Be prepared for change and stay ahead of the curve. Flexibility in your career may take you a long way, especially in tough economic times.

Don't be tempted by a shiny new title. A bigger title usually comes with a pay raise and more perks, but some companies have discovered that a simple change in title with few additional incentives is enough to keep a person motivated. This line of thinking doesn't make sense to me at all. If you are going to take on more responsibility, put in more time, and add more value to the company, there should be something substantial in it for you. Take time to fully evaluate any "promotion." Doing more work for the same pay (or less) seems like a demotion—not a promotion—to me.

Recognize "deal or no deal" situations. Don't be afraid to walk away from deals that just can't seem to come together. Most people don't negotiate well because they really want what the other person has and they don't want to risk losing it. But whether it's a big contract, a job, a promotion, or a new car, you have to be willing to walk away. When you are willing to do so, you will be pleasantly surprised at how much better your negotiations turn out. Suddenly, what you offer carries value, and the tables often turn.

Constantly add value. Companies are in the business of making money. To a certain extent, we all have to pull the company line and help keep the revenue machine running. Make sure that you continually add value to the company. Find ways to improve yourself and your processes. All employees are expendable, and if it makes financial sense to the company, you will be replaced or eliminated altogether.

Sing your own praises, but not too loudly. As a general rule, your work won't speak for itself. *You* must speak for yourself. You can really help yourself by making sure that managers and supervisors in your organization understand the effort you put into your job and the results you produce. A bit of modest bragging will not only help you come promotion time, but it will also help discredit any attacks levied against you. Provide the right amount of information about yourself, but don't beat your accomplishments to death. Too many trips to the boss's office will annoy him, and may work against you.

Get smart. Too many people don't understand the basics about the operation of their companies. Learn the organizational chart and reporting structures. Study and understand your company's financials. Financial data is the basis for many decisions, decisions that may very well affect your wallet. You never know where your life may lead. Learn as much as you can along the way, even though what you're learning may not seem relevant at the time.

Be a confident innovator. When you pitch your ideas to management, be prepared to defend your views. Also be prepared to receive criticism. Management will challenge you simply to test your level of enthusiasm for the idea and its viability. There are a lot of variables to consider, and management wants to know you've thought about them. If you support your ideas with solid research and show some passion, management will be more likely to embrace your concept.

Nix the naysayers. People tend to emphasize negative things in the workplace over positive things. One negative person or event can tear down months of motivation in minutes. Evaluate the people working in your department or on your project. Do the personalities work well together? Some people cannot or will not get on board. Don't spend an inordinate amount of time trying to convince them to join in. Give them an opportunity to correct their negative attitudes, but if they persist, remove them from the group or project. There are not enough hours in the day to convert someone who has convinced herself that she doesn't want to follow your plan.

Don't ask for more than you deserve. American corporations seem to have become the land of entitlement where people expect to be highly compensated before they have provided one penny of value to the company. Throughout your career, evaluate what value you bring to your company. Ask for fair compensation, but don't price yourself out of the market. Employment is a two-way street, so make sure you are giving something for what you get.

Keep an eye on your e-trail. Not only do we need to make sure we cover ourselves from a legal perspective, but we also need to cover our asses day-to-day. The best way to do this nowadays is to save all e-mail and electronic data that is available to you. If you have ever received an e-mail

from someone asking you to confirm something, that person is likely covering his ass. This is not a bad thing and in many cases can clear up any confusion later. Even the most obscure e-mail may be relevant at a later date. Disk space is cheap compared to the trouble it may save you.

Don't be afraid to say no. That is, if you're doing such a great job your company can't afford to get rid of you anyway. If you don't set limits, you will find yourself working on a perpetual treadmill.

Trust your intuition. Good intuition in the business world can be your guardian angel. If it feels like someone is up to no good, she probably is. In most cases you will find that your initial instinct about someone is usually correct. Keep that instinct in mind as you work with her and always remember how you felt that first day. Stick to your convictions!

Get a life. It's good to be committed to the company, and corporate accomplishments are rewarding, but when all is said and done, a lifetime goes by too fast. Try not to take your job home with you. This not only makes things more stressful for you but it also puts undue pressure on those around you. I am a firm believer that you get what you give. If you are happy, those around you will be happy as well.

Know which rung on the ladder is right for you. Do you want to be responsible for the success or failure of your company? If so, move up the ladder. Do you want to go home at five every day and forget about work until the next morning? Then moving up the ladder is not for you. Most people want to move up the ladder because that's what they've been told they should do. But the really important thing is that you do your job to the best of your ability and you are happy doing it.

Shut up and listen. If you don't know what you don't know, then seek out some experienced advice. A mentor can warn you about things you may never have considered and keep you from being blindsided by unforeseen events or costs. As hard as it may be, the first step is to admit to yourself that you don't know everything.

Learn the difference between e-communication and *real* communication. Communicating with people is an opportunity not only to transfer information, but also to build relationships with them at the same time. With all the forms of electronic communication available today, our conversations are becoming more and more impersonal. Not only are texts and e-mails inefficient and sometimes carried to ridiculous extremes, they are also costing us our personal relationships. I want employees who will interact with people and solve problems. If you can't interact with people directly, you have no value.

Add sales to your skill set. When it comes to You, Inc., there is only one person on the sales team: you! Despite what your resume says, adding sales to your skill set is a must. Whenever you are trying to pitch a new idea to your company, you'll have to have a sales pitch that is convincing and sound. And if you are vying for a promotion or raise, you'll need to be prepared to pitch yourself. Be ready to defend your views and have answers for the tough questions. And

remember, everybody has a right to their own opinions, so don't get defensive if someone disagrees with you—just support your ideas with solid research and your own enthusiasm, and they'll be singing a different tune in no time.

If it isn't broken, don't fix it. In business, change can often be confused with progress. Often you'll find that companies are making changes and improvements for the sake of change—and not because anything was truly wrong in the first place. Likewise, employees feel the pressure to constantly make improvement to things to keep up the appearance of productivity and to prove their worth. But this is a mistake. The only reason to change something is to make it better than it was previously. The goal is improvement. Put a time limit on your own goals so that you don't chase a bad idea longer than you should. And if the system, idea, or product you currently have in place works well—then let it be, and concentrate your efforts on the things that *truly* need it.

Say no to working vacations. When you take your vacation, *take your vacation!* Remove yourself from the job completely. Don't offer to check e-mail and voicemail while you are away. I have made this mistake and I can tell you if you do it, you might as well have stayed at work. A lot of companies offer rewards and perks like club trips or weekend getaways. Although these are great and can be a lot of fun, they are not vacations. They are still about the company, and you will still be working. You'll just be out of the office.

If you go through your workdays just trying not to get fired, then you are probably headed for trouble. Instead, push those negative thoughts out of your mind. Focus on the work you do and how you add value to your company. Infuse positivity and a can-do attitude to those on your team. Work smarter than your competition and you can get ahead every time.

About the Author:***Blaine Loomer****Author*

Blaine Loomer's expertise in the corporate world evolves from over 20 years of experience in corporate management and sales. He is the author of *Corporate Bullsh*t: A Survival Guide* (Mitchell Publishers Inc., 2009) and has consulted with thousands of companies over the years from enterprising individuals of mom and pop shops to executive officers of some of the largest corporations in America. As a corporate sales expert, he has hired, educated, and managed sales teams across North America. Over the years Blaine has logged millions of miles and fostered business relationships with thousands of people from all walks of life, both domestic and international. Through his travels and experiences, he has gathered a wealth of knowledge. After 20 years he has decided to put down the suitcase and share what he has learned with you in an effort to help you succeed in the pursuit of your career.

*Corporate Bullsh*t: A Survival Guide* (Mitchell Publishers Inc., 2009, ISBN: 978-0-9842016-0-0, \$29.50) is available at bookstores nationwide and from major online booksellers. For more information, please visit www.corporatebsguide.com.