

Avoid Getting Reorganized Out of Your Company

BY EILEEN GUNN

Reorganizations grab fewer headlines than job losses, but they are common in a recession, and often precede or follow layoffs. And they can be as just as disheartening. It can be difficult to figure out where you fit in as management changes



are made, new work groups are formed, and you find yourself working for a new

boss. To survive, you'll need to adapt, while also assessing the future of your job.

■ **Make the most of the first team meeting.** "Be bold," advises Jay Gaines, an executive recruiter in New York. Ask for details about your new manager's priorities, what he or she plans to keep or change in the department, his or her preferred style of working and communicating, and whether cost cuts are part of the changes. The more you ask, the more forthcoming others will be with their own questions—and the more information the team will have.

■ **Do a self-assessment.** Think about what you have to offer to the new team and its leader, advises Licia Hahn, an executive coach in New York. What skills have you been using that will continue to be valuable? And what new skills or expertise do you need in order to be more valuable? "You need to be flexible and nimble in this economy," Ms. Hahn says. "If the thing your boss needs most isn't your favorite thing to do," adjust your attitude and do it—and well—for now.

■ **Schedule one-on-one time.** Sit down with your new boss as soon as possible "and treat that first meeting like a job interview," Ms. Hahn advises. "Show

them everything you've done in your career so far" and point out what you have to offer in support of the new agenda. Ask the boss about his or her priorities for you. Offer to be available should the new boss have questions about the group or projects, and if you've already been through a few reorganizations, what has and hasn't worked in the past. "Being the boss's right hand in this way earns huge brownie points," Ms. Hahn says. Just be careful not to alienate your peers, say, by talking down their pet projects.

■ **Ask the tough questions.** If your gut instinct—or the water cooler talk—tells you that layoffs are coming, both Ms. Hahn and Mr. Gaines advise summoning up the nerve to ask whether you will have a job in the new organization and whether your role will be vital or marginal. While an unwelcome answer might be stressful, knowing what's coming will give you time to plan, negotiate severance and seek out other opportunities.

■ **Accept the new reality.** "There's often what I call the Dilbert effect after a restructuring," says career coach and author Marshall Goldsmith. "People sit in their cubes and complain about how stupid the people in charge are." But adapting to the new way of doing things "is the best way to keep your job these days," Mr. Goldsmith says. He suggests thinking of your new boss, his boss, and so on, as your customers. "You learn to make peace with your external customers' quirks and you need to do the same with your internal customers."

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