

THE OAKLAND PRESS **BUSINESS**

Mostly Cloudy, 32°
5 day forecast

Subscribe

Search

JOB
AUTOS
HOMES

AUBURN PONTIAC - GMC Auburn Pontiac GMC Pre-Owned
 Financing Solutions For Everyone!
 1-888-375-1083
 Let Us Go To Work For You!

SITE MENU...

Other News Links

Home > Opinions > Only the lonely

Sunday, December 10, 2006

E-mail Print

Only the lonely

Web-posted Dec 10, 2006

Those left after downsizing can feel disenchant

By GARY GOSSELIN
Press Business Editor

With tens of thousands of workers being downsized, bought out or simply terminated in Michigan nowadays, there are hundreds of thousands more still working, picking up the slack and generally not feeling too good about it.

It's called "survivor syndrome," a documented malaise that can lower productivity, increase illness and send a company's best workers fleeing for greener pastures.

"With the large number of downsizings that have occurred in recent years, companies would be well-advised to investigate their layoff procedures," reported William A. Nowlin in Supervision magazine. "Often overlooked in layoffs are the effects on those who remain. Survivors may experience anxiety as to their own job permanence, guilt from the loss of friends among their co-workers, or anger that can arise from insensitivity shown in terminations."

And that doesn't take into account the work those folks left behind either, said Lee Meadows, management professor at Walsh College in Troy.

"Much has been written about the best way to conduct layoffs, but little prescription has been given for the day-to-day malaise of layoff survivors - the individuals now expected to lead the company into success," Meadows said.

Resentment is an issue in those remaining, reported Suzanne Behr and Margaret White in Executive Excellence magazine.

"The real intriguing thing is that part of the survivor guilt is people say, 'Because I've kept my job, I'd better not complain when things change,' he said, an attitude that fosters resentment.

Advertisement

FREE*
\$25 Gift Card!

click here

EasyMealGiftCard.com *see details



TOP JOBS

- INSIDE SALES**
Rapidly growing Oxford, MI-based digital entertainment company is looking for an energetic, hard-working,
- LICENSED PRACTICAL NURSE**
Practice the true profession of nursing, where your skills are fully utilized and you see the
- OPERATIONS MANAGEMENT**
Concrete Products Manufacturer is seeking assistant to General Manager/Owner. Highly visible and c.....

View all TopJobs

TOP AUTOS

- FORD F250 SC** 2003 4x4 8', loaded, low mi., Century cap, \$16,900 Leave mess. 248-375-8851...

Increased workload is an added strain when employees are cut.

"Even though they are gone, their jobs are not, and it falls on the survivor," Meadows said. "They go through a thing called job extension; that person to the left and right of you, they are not there, but your job just extended to their desk and you have to cover for them."

Maryann Hazen, professor of business administration at University of Detroit Mercy, says massive job cuts violate an implied contract.

"There was a psychological contract, the implicit agreement between the employee and employer, and for most people the contract is, 'If I do my job and do good work they will continue to employ me.' But with downsizing that's out the window," she said.

That not only causes resentment of those who have left and might understandably be upset anyhow, but also fosters insecurity for those who remain, creating suspicion and worry that they may be next, she said.

"Recognize that you're not alone," Meadows said. "It's OK for survivors to have remorse, but not to hold each other down. You do have to go through a grieving process, but then you have to say, 'We all know what we're up against; and now what do we do about it? Complaining is not going to do anything for us anymore.' We may say, 'We have to figure out how we can work it out together.'"

"You still keep everybody actively engaged, and therapeutically help get each other through it," Meadows added. "You don't want someone who is a survivor to go through it alone. All they're doing is accelerating the process, and they may end up unemployed."

Reducing anxiety

Survivors also may feel relieved that the company has retained them, Nowlin noted, and businesses can take a number of steps to minimize all the negative feelings among survivors.

"Both those remaining and those laid off should be made aware of the basis for decision choices," Nowlin said in his report. "Notify the survivors when layoff goals have been achieved. Be truthful and consistent. The wise employer will make counseling services available to those employees who remain disturbed about the layoffs."

Meadows said you can expect a much higher rate of burnout, as those remaining feel they have to work later and longer to take up the slack.

"With as much as we do planning in an organization, we never teach (employees) how to get ahead, we teach them to rally at the last minute, and they're really always putting out fires," Meadows said. "We face these issues all the time. At some time the organization will finally have to come up for air and say 'We have to rethink how we do things.' That's inevitable for any organization that has downsized. Either get rid of tasks or hire more contract work to maintain quality with less people."

The manager's job is to encourage teams to view layoffs as a means of survival and strengthening, rather than a slow and painful death, Behr and White said. During times of stress, management support is needed in four vital areas: emotional support, informational support, directional support and tactical support. Right after the layoffs, the healing process begins with the manager asking and answering questions that pertain to the four key support areas.

"Layoffs affect the security of the remaining employees, and many companies do not know how to handle the resulting decline in morale and motivation. Symptoms of stress appear in the workers, and often the best workers will leave, assuming they will have more security elsewhere. While not all of the problems related to layoffs can be prevented, they can be stemmed by being straightforward, Behr and White explained.

"The company should quickly let everyone know what has happened after a layoff and give fair compensation to those leaving," they said. "The remaining employees will know that if another layoff occurs, they will be treated fairly."

Meadows urges pushing past the emotional fallout.

"First you get mad, and once you got over that, figure what to do about it, work it out constructively," she said. "Figure what are you going to do about it, and stick with the strategy so you can see the end.

"Some of that anger is healthy in an odd way, but you have to get over it. Survivors are

 [View all TopAutos](#)

 **TOP HOMES**

▶ **COMMERCE 5 bdrm.**, All Sports lakefront, Available Feb. 1, \$1900 248-931-3442...

▶ **CLARKSTON Quiet Complex** On Lake! Specials beginning at \$540 per month. Low security dep. Includes Heat! Lakefronts avail.....

▶ **FARMINGTON HILLS 31031** Berryhill 4 bdrm., 2.5 bath Colonial, deck, rec. room, extras. \$263,900 Open Sun. Jan. 7 1 - 5.....

 [View all TopHomes](#)

going to have to get past the guilt, and never lose your compassion for colleagues, but understand under other circumstances that could be you."

 [E-mail](#)  [Print](#)

Expanded Classified Hours:

CLASSIFIED IS NOW OPEN ON SATURDAY FROM 9AM - NOON
TO BETTER SERVE YOU!

[Feedback](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Place A Classified Ad](#) | Copyright © 2007 The Oakland Press, All Rights Reserved |