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Reaching Consensus:

## My Company has Downsized...so My Work has been Upsized

by Deborah Zarsky

*In this economy, I am happy to have a job. At the same time, since so many people were let go from the company, my boss is expecting me to do double work. How do I say “no” to some projects and still be seen as a team player?*

As you point out, those who have lost their jobs are not the only victims of a tough economy; those who are left have had to pick up the slack. While those of us with jobs appreciate that things could be worse, taking on extra responsibilities and working longer hours is easier said than done when you are feeling overworked.

Start by considering that there might be bigger forces at work. Most likely, your boss is not simply electing to be demanding or singling you out. She probably is either reacting to economic pressures or responding to a directive from her supervisor – or both. In any event, her behavior is the result of something external to your relationship with her, and, given the circumstances, you can't assign her (or anyone else) blame.

Still, what to do?

Take a look around you. Are you more or less overworked than others? If so, why? Look within. Perhaps you aren't as efficient as others and it takes you longer to complete the same assignment. Maybe you don't manage your time as well. Or, you voluntarily take on projects that, while interesting to you, aren't really needed or expected. If any of these are the case, address the deficiency – read a book, attend a workshop, turn to a mentor...and learn how to improve your skills, better manage your time, prioritize your work, etc. The time invested up front will pay huge dividends going forward.

Now, if you find that there, indeed, is an imbalance – that you are tasked with more than your colleagues – or if you honestly can't handle the load, talk with your manager. Schedule a time when things are most calm; do not time your discussion for when she's assigning you work or when you're on a deadline.

At the meeting, discuss the team's needs and how you see your role. Try to learn how and why your boss decides whom to assign projects to. You might discover new information that makes you feel differently (e.g., that you are being groomed for a promotion, for a huge bonus, etc.). Either way, once you have heard her out, you can share your feelings (exhaustion, frustration, jealousy, unappreciated, etc.) as long as you don't cast aspersions. Acknowledge your own contributions to the situation, including ways in which you could improve (e.g., improve your skills, manage your time better, better prioritize your work, etc.). Ask her if, together, you can explore different options for getting the work done, including addressing your personal shortcomings and tapping other resources.

It is imperative that you not sound “whiny” and that you are not seen as adding to your manager's headaches. After all, with the cutbacks, she surely is facing challenges of her own. Although you have self-interests, your conversation should be mindful of the collective interests of your department, including those of your boss.

Finding a solution will require creativity and an open mind. It can't be a one-sided process in which only your interests are addressed. Nevertheless, by engaging your manager in a way that communicates you care about your work, the team, and her needs, she likely will sympathize with your predicament and collaborate on identifying a solution that works for everyone.

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