

A Technical Job is Not All about Being Technical

The tech job market is tough and will continue to be so. Technological changes are a major cause of worker displacement, and changes in technology affect those in tech jobs faster than those in other fields. No other era has seen such quantum leaps in paradigm-shifting technology in such short periods of time.

The technical knowledge you have in the morning may be obsolete by evening.

In our information-based era, new technology is blossoming and fading faster than ever. The latest cars have more computerization than the Apollo 13 spacecraft, and the job of an auto mechanic can scarcely be termed low-tech any longer. In the manufacturing sector, jobs and processes have already shifted to countries where there is cheaper labor. In the knowledge sector, jobs that can be handled remotely have already become remote. Amidst the fast-paced environment of the job market, relying simply on your technological skills to carry you through is no longer an effective career strategy. Continually updating your skill sets and developing other skills beyond your arsenal of technical abilities are essential today for a successful tech career.

The techie who keeps his or her job is a survivor first and a techie second.

The best worker is never laid off from his or her job. Corporations go to great lengths, including offering training programs, to retain valuable talent in technological jobs. However, when your present technological skills are not adequate to cope with new technology in the field, your employer's decision to retain you will not depend on your technological skills. Your employer has to view you as something more than a simple techie, and it is up to you to make him or her see that. When employers are sure of the adaptive and results-oriented nature of an individual employee, his or her name is never going to be on the list of possible layoffs when there is an impending change in the work environment.

Increase your value to your employer.

- Work the in-house network. Don't just be the guy who's referred to for specific technical problems. Be identified as a person who speaks the language of management.
- Make connections with senior-level managers. Without connecting with senior staff members, you will never come to know the unwritten rules within a company and the industry. The knowledge and information you gain from senior staff will help you make better on-the-job decisions.
- Honor the time of superiors and your commitments. Failing to keep commitments and wasting the time of senior-level staff and superiors is one of the easiest ways to lose credibility. On the other hand, honoring their time and your commitments builds the credibility you need to stay and progress in your career. Rather than looking for what someone can do for you, look for what you can do for someone else.
- Volunteer for projects that others are not ready to accept. More often than not, the manager who makes the assignment knows which project most employees will try to avoid. Your willingness to take the risk and help out will stand you in good stead.
- Volunteer for projects that span departments. Accomplishments related to projects that span different departments help to build your professional reputation.
- Focus on accomplishments. Problems at work are often generic across companies and industries. Today, more emphasis is given to accomplishments on the job than to time spent in the job. Exhibiting effectiveness in generic areas increases your value both to your current and prospective employers.
- Ask for informal evaluations from senior staff members and management. Having an informal conversation with your manager about your work saves you from unpleasant surprises. Open channels of communication reduce misunderstandings and misjudgments.
- Don't be afraid to blow your own horn. Being modest about your accomplishments is not going to serve you well. Do not be arrogant, but make sure everybody concerned is aware of your bottom-line contributions to the company.
- Take every opportunity to cross train. Select an area of interest like marketing or sales within your company and cross train yourself.

Remain alert and develop yourself.

- Never be complacent. Complacency leads to inactivity, arrogance, and loss of sharpness.
- Keep yourself ready for the eventuality of a job loss. Read the changes in the wind and be prepared to respond efficiently when they affect you adversely. Keep looking for better opportunities all the time. Remember, it is always easier to negotiate with a prospective employer while employed than it is to negotiate as an unemployed worker.
- Identify other opportunities. Do not ignore career options that are far from the beaten track. Continually assess how your skills can fit into another position or another industry. Try to identify opportunities outside your sphere of familiarity.
- Be prepared to reorient your career objectives according to the market situation. Don't be inflexible. If situations demand that you leave your comfort zone, do so, and don't rule out relocation or a pay cut when there are better future prospects.
- Never stop learning. Take advantage of all company offers of training seminars or tuition reimbursement. A lot of people suddenly put a stop to their learning mode after finishing their schooling. Do not end your education with your degree.

Above all else, be confident that you can always find work. That's the manual for job survival.

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