



## Mastering Technical Sales

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John Care, Managing Director

## Protecting Your Job In A Recession (And How To Get A New One If You Need To)

*"Bulletproof Your Job!"* screamed the headline in the financial section of our local newspaper. *"Bounce Back After Being Laid Off"* is the main article on SmartMoney.com and the local restaurant is running a daily Recession Special.

Traditionally, the Sales Engineering organization is one of the last pieces of a company to be downsized, but it happens. Throw in the dubious state of the global economy, the belt tightening being reported in the IT community and we are in for some tough times over the next 12 months. So what steps can you take to protect your current job, yet be ready to get a new one if you need to?

### Playing Defense

Last month's Talking Point dealt with clichés, yet "the best offense is a good defense" really does apply in this case. Follow the Simple Six Steps and take some control of your own personal situation.

1. **Fill In The Gaps.** Within every Sales Engineering organization there are jobs and tasks which just are not being done. Look for a gap in coverage, skills or process which you can fill in and make yourself even more valuable. Learn more about a new or existing product, or vertical market, or create a process which can make everyone else more effective. Build up your star power!
2. **Don't Be Passive.** Although it may be contrary to the SE stereotype, you need some self-promotion and an assist from your boss. If you have closed a major deal or handled a tricky customer situation, get some good press about it, without going Hollywood over it. Since customers are responsible for 100% of your company's revenues, getting some rave reviews and praise from both customers and salespeople can go a long way too.

3. **Powerful or Powerless.** Amplifying point #2, the closer to the revenue sharp end of the customers you are, the better your chance of survival. Hanging out in a staff or special projects position during a cutback is dangerous - even more reason to get closer to your end customer, whether they are internal or external. Another aspect of power is visibility - 80% of success is showing up - so show up at all those internal opportunity review meetings, product conference calls etc.
4. **Be A Confident Survivor.** The best thing you can do in a recession is to lighten up, and consider it the mental equivalent of dress for success. If you act like a survivor it is more likely you will survive - as people (even bosses) have a desire to be around cheerful, confident and positive people. Remember to make sure you say thank you to all those folks in other departments who help you do your job, like completing RFPs, answering support questions, making futures presentations or handling implementation questions. This assists you in point #6 (networking).
5. **Accept Change.** Your boss has some difficult decisions to make, and could use your help instead of your opposition. Change is inevitable, so if a restructuring is coming, get on board with it, and provide some constructive ideas to help it succeed, instead of being a nay-sayer. Become a beacon of change, read [John Kotter's books](#) for some suggestions and to understand the management terminology.
6. **Network, Network and Network.** Start reaching out to your contacts inside other departments like Engineering, Support, Product Marketing and Sales. Any time you are eating at your desk instead of with a colleague you are losing a networking opportunity. At the very least they will be able to give you a different slant on current events, and at best they may be aware of other opportunities or projects within the company.

## Playing Offense

When the writing is on the wall and you realistically know that the end is coming, either for you or the entire company, here are four ideas for you to consider. I'd make a case that you should continually be taking these actions anyway, as a form of preventative maintenance for your entire career. These go beyond the standard advice around keeping your resume current, staying busy, producing high quality work and not being high maintenance.

1. **Examine Your Skills.** While you are looking to fill the gaps, you may come to the realization that your skills are getting dated. Make a list of your technical skills, business skills and soft skills, and don't just limit them to your immediate position. For example, if you have made several sales to the R&D divisions of pharmaceutical companies in the last year you have likely learnt a considerable amount about the clinical trials process.
2. **Network, Network and Network Again.** In addition to all the internal networking, ramp up your external networking as well. Reach out and electronically touch your contacts in LinkedIn, Plaxo and Facebook so that the first time they hear from you in months is not when you are asking for a job or a reference.
3. **Have A Plan.** Know what you are good at and know what you want. Develop a short 30-45 second elevator pitch you can give to prospective employers, networkers and friends which describes those two topics. Don't blast your resume out to every recruiter you know and post on monster.com and every other job board. Several years ago I had the same applicant for a SE position referred to me by seven different recruiters - not a good start to a job hunt as it smacks of desperation.
4. **Be Creative.** Just because you are a sales engineer working with a particular product or service doesn't mean that you have to stay in that industry. Think about product management or marketing or even sales. Be more creative - if you have always dreamed about going back to school, starting your own business or writing a book now may be the time to fulfill that dream.

## Summary

Take charge of your own situation and start looking for extra tasks, skills and projects rather than keeping your head down. Act like a survivor, accept change and reach out now to friends, colleagues and customers just to renew your connections. So prepare for the worst, but expect the best.

"If I had six hours to chop down a tree, I'd spend the first hour sharpening the axe"

*Abraham Lincoln*

Talking Points is a monthly column authored by John Care, Managing Director of Mastering Technical Sales. For more information on this and other Sales Engineering topics visit the website at [www.masteringtechnicalsales.com](http://www.masteringtechnicalsales.com).

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