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When it comes to future job security and career success, you're going to have to count more and more on one person: you. Thinking like an entrepreneur at the office will make you more valuable to your boss and more marketable in the overall job market.

Since launching my own business in 2005, I've discovered seven indispensable rules that work just as well in a corporate environment as they work in acquiring, serving and retaining clients. But first, let me point out two economic trends that should be tilting you toward a more entrepreneurial attitude.

Nothing New: The World is Flat

You've heard it before and here it is again: The world is flat. You aren't competing with the person in the next cubicle or the next city. You're competing with people in Mexico, Taiwan and India.

"Companies and individuals must continually reinvent themselves to continue to provide value to the customer or employer," said Mary Corrado, president of the American Society of Employers (ASE) in Southfield. "Employers can't afford to have someone doing a job if it can be done somewhere else less expensively.

"Work flows downhill like water," she continued. "It's relentless and unstoppable. It will always be done by the person or process that can do it most cheaply."

The media has done such a good job

A Strategic Plan for Your Career

by Sharlan Douglas, APR

telling the dramatic story of globalization that you may not have noticed another more subtle trend: Marketplace risk has shifted from the employer to the employee.

"In the booming post-World War II economy, workers offered a company loyalty; in return, the company offered security," wrote Daniel Pink in his 2001 book, *Free Agent Nation*. "In the security-for-loyalty bargain, the organization bore most of the risk of the enterprise... But when competition and new technologies proliferated, the total volume of risk increased, sometimes substantially. Companies grew weary of carrying the full load, so they started shifting risk onto their employees. The individual, not the organization has become the economy's fundamental unit," he said.

Those individual economic units today number 30 million — 25 percent of the American work force, according to Pink. Even if you're one of the other 90 million, try pretending that you're running a small business, and your product is YOU.

Rules for the Small Business Owner

Your boss is your client and you need to do whatever he/she needs to succeed. That certainly doesn't mean being a "yes man." Your wise counsel and independent judgment are what keep your job from flowing overseas. However, it does mean private and public loyalty, biting your tongue and staying late. Always work on selling your ideas. Look for problems and offer to solve them.

Knowledge is capital for an entrepreneur, and what you learn will stay with you forever. If your organization won't pay for ORGPRO, CAE/CMP training or MSAE's Academy, offer to split the fee or pay it yourself if necessary.

The bottom line is you must plan your career strategically. "You need to look at each employment situation, asking not just 'What's the pay? What's the benefit?' but 'What new skills can I acquire in this job?'" Corrado said. In

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other words, paid tuition, job-related training, contact with board members or a prestigious title may pay off two jobs down the line. Who's to say that job won't be right there where you're currently working?

Here are some important ways to plan a career strategy:

- **Quantify your results.** Negotiate your raises and promotions based not on your need, but on what you've done for the organization.
- **Motivate yourself.** Nobody is standing over that free agent working at home, reminding him of tomorrow's deadline. If he misses it, he doesn't get paid.
- **Join your association.** "If you're

not well connected to your profession, it's harder to sharpen your skills, keep up-to-date on trends and find new gigs. This helps explain why membership in professional associations ... is rising as sharply as membership in labor unions is falling," Pink wrote.

Perhaps that's the best news of all. Despite the sluggish economy and flattening of the world, opportunities for professional and trade association staff should continue to grow. Hone your entrepreneurial skills to help our industry, your organization and yourself succeed. ♦

Sharlan Douglas is president of Douglas Communications Group.



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