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Career Planning

How to Crisis-Proof Your Career

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Summary. The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for effective crisis management — both organizationally and personally. Here are three tips for how to be in control of your career during a crisis. When a company is “all hands on deck,” create and demonstrate your... [more](#)

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It's been more than 100 days since the official declaration of the Covid-19 pandemic. If you had major plans to kickstart or revamp your career this year, like everyone else, you're probably thinking, "Now what?"

Companies with the best chance of surviving and growing beyond this economic crisis are those that swiftly and steadily employ a crisis-management approach in their enterprise. Similarly, your career is your "enterprise" and as captain of your career trajectory, it's completely up to you how you choose to steer your ship during this crisis.

When the Great Recession of 2008 struck, I was in my mid-20s, barely three months into the most intense corporate role of my life at a multi-billion dollar conglomerate. The lessons I learned then bolstered me through all the highs and lows that followed in my career and helped me navigate this "fog" we're now going through.

Here are three lessons I learned on how to crisis-proof my career.

Create visible value. In virtually every company, a crisis is a call for all hands on deck. The leadership top brass is forced to make tough decisions to keep the company afloat, without inhibiting room for future growth.

It's in amorphous, unpredictable times like these that leaders are on the lookout for talented employees capable of achieving tangible outcomes during a crisis. Creating value in crisis times is always an achievement but doing so "visibly" can have an exponential impact on your career. Everyone remembers those who rise to the occasion in times of difficulty.

Being "visible" in the current situation is especially complex as most of us may be working remotely for an indefinite time frame. However,

there are plenty of ways to generate visible value by adopting one of the following roles:

- **Information curator:** You can actively share important industry-related news with your organization and drive discussions about the latest sector developments amongst your smaller peer/team circle.
- **Thought leader:** You can develop your own proprietary insights on your specific field of expertise or industry and work on establishing your authority as a specialist or expert. Create your blog or mini-newsletter, contribute to an industry publication or podcast, or share your thoughts on platforms like Medium or LinkedIn.
- **Catalyzer:** If you're a team lead, create a small ideation team (intra-department or cross-functional) that encourages members to actively brainstorm new modes of growth.

Each of these roles represents a specific way in which you can create value that is relevant to your organization and lays the groundwork for building your long-term professional credibility. Several business leaders I've interviewed during the pandemic emphasize that they value the diversity of thought that young and early career employees can bring to their internal Covid-19 crisis task force. By communicating your intent to your supervisor or department, you put yourself on the leadership radar.

Learn how to solve complex business problems. Virtually every C-suite leader I've interviewed as a journalist has vouched for “never letting a crisis go to waste.” Deeply volatile times like these serve as the perfect opportunity to learn how to solve complex business problems systematically, strategically, and with some degree of speed.

Adopt a growth mindset in terms of learning on the job as much as you can, even in aspects far removed from your normal role. This is often a time when formal “learning and development” takes a backseat as most organizations slash budgets. The onus is on you to find opportunities to keep learning.

During the 2008 financial crisis, I was privileged to be a direct report to the CEO and deputy CEO, constantly in the company of the C-suite, attending several senior management and board meetings. By simply being in the same room as these decision-makers and observing their exchanges, I quickly appraised how leadership and problem-solving in crisis times are markedly different from steady-state scenarios. How does a CEO decide to abandon a major senior leadership recruitment drive for the entire organization when there is still so much lack of clarity about how long the crisis may go on for? How do leaders decide which projects to build and which get killed? In my experience, the answers to these tough questions are best learned in real-time, not through a textbook.

Actively seek out leaders or mentors in your organization whose leadership style and track record you admire or individuals who have been appointed to lead crisis-specific initiatives. You can request a warm introduction through a common colleague or simply introduce yourself via email and express your interest in receiving mentorship or the opportunity to shadow them for a few hours a week.

Another way to expose yourself to sophisticated business deliberations is to request to assist the secretary of one or more of the company-wide crisis task forces that will be formed to guide the organization during this time. The task force secretary — typically an in-house lawyer or member of the strategy team — orchestrates and minutes every meeting. By offering your assistance, you demonstrate visible involvement towards a valuable exercise while also improving your understanding of crucial business issues at hand that you may want to contribute to in the future.



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Examine your role and industry for growth. A number of enterprises are prudently shedding static parts of the organization to maintain a lean operation and best position themselves to respond to future opportunities. I've seen projects launched with much fanfare the summer of 2008 die a quick and quiet death fairly soon after the global financial crisis began. Very large companies will consolidate entities or entire divisions and some of them will channel resources and funding towards aspects of the business best suited for growth given prevailing market preferences and future trends.

When organizations undertake major internal re-structuring exercises, these can often take a few months of deliberation followed by implementation. To best position yourself for career opportunities within those parts of the organization earmarked for future investment and growth, it's important that you develop a solid information filter, either through your relationship with a senior leader or mentor in the organization or by shadowing in key strategic task forces within the organization. By gaining access to early information through vetted channels, you can appraise which direction the company is looking to move into and accordingly make yourself visible to the right people. Alternatively, if you find yourself in an organization that is not doing enough to adapt to market demands, this is also a sign for you to begin looking elsewhere for growth opportunities.

It's also important to keep a lens outside your specific industry. During the global financial crisis, e-commerce, ride-sharing, online aggregators, and co-working companies grew rapidly. Currently,

alternative protein, digital health, and agritech are just some of the sectors that have benefited from an evolving consumer mindset. Start learning more about sectors entering hyper-growth. Find out which companies have launched new products amidst the pandemic or who **Natasha D'Souza** is a journalist, business strategist, and speaker, passionate about **has announced a new funding round**. You may find yourself drawn to **an ever-expanding array of frontier industries** are hungry for fresh **and resilience in our rapidly evolving world**. Based in Dubai, she reports for global business media and is also a sought-after international conference chair and moderator. A serial career pivot pro, she segued from delivering business intelligence for the Fortune 500 to championing disability rights in South America to restructuring multi-billion dollar real estate projects in the Middle East, all in her twenties. Connect with her on Instagram or LinkedIn and find out more at www.natasha-dsouza.com