

IN-HOUSE ISSUES

YOUR BUCKET LIST

If you're worried that your position is about to be outsourced, you probably feel like you're out of control. Following are 10 things you can do to take back the reins and make sure your career doesn't kick the bucket.

Preparing monthly and annual production reports that capture your activity and show your cost-effectiveness is essential to justifying your existence to the bean counters.

If you're a part of an in-house design department, you may sometimes feel like there's a target on your back and that you're next on the block to be outsourced. Sometimes it's inevitable and has little to do with your talent, expertise, cost-effectiveness, performance or credibility, but is just a sign of the times. A trend. The pendulum swings to the right every few years, then to the left, and then back again. When companies decide to cut jobs and outsource certain business functions, all you have to do is wait a few years for some new director to suggest that they could save a ton of money if they brought the same services in-house. Feeling vulnerable and helpless? Don't despair. This list serves as a kind of preventive maintenance to undertake before they foreclose on your department, sell the flat files and fill the space with 50 workstations. Don't laugh. I've seen it happen.

1. DO GOOD WORK

Do good work. Really good work. And to do really good work, you'll need good people. Good people with the chops to deliver the goods—day in and day out. If you're building a department, take extra care to find the right people to realize and support your vision and your company's core business objectives. And if you already have a fully staffed department, invest in your people. Nurture and develop their talents by giving them the opportunity to enhance their skill sets through onsite or offsite training. Champion high performance by setting clear expectations, recognizing excellence and celebrating achievements. Take ownership of your department. If you lead by example, they will follow.

2. ADVERTISE

Marketing your department is a must for any in-house creative group. And there are a variety of simple and easy ways you can attract attention and flaunt your stuff. Organizing an open house is the perfect way to make new friends and reintroduce yourself to some old ones. Make sure you have lots of samples of your work (and snacks). Build a department website that showcases your team and the great work they do. Develop a capabilities brochure. Create a CD with either a PowerPoint or Flash presentation that highlights your department's capabilities and services (a nice takeaway piece for your clients). It's not enough just to do good work. You have to tell people about it.

3. WIN

Everybody loves a winner, so when someone in your team is recognized for a job well done, either internally or by a well-respected design competition, don't keep it to yourself. Send a note to your boss and to your boss' boss. Write a press release, contact your public affairs department and ask them to include it in your company's newsletter or business update. Also, contact the client who initiated the project and include them in the celebration (a good photo op). And make sure you send your client a copy of the award so they can show it off to their colleagues. And finally, just like the big agencies, proudly display your framed award certificates and statuettes in your office or workspace for all to see. This will help to enhance your department's credibility and in turn strengthen your business relationships with your in-house stakeholders who may think twice before outsourcing.

4. BE A RESOURCE

Just because your department can't print Duratrans back-lit panels or typeset Braille in-house doesn't mean you should send your clients walking. Welcome all requests, no matter how unusual, and encourage your internal clients to contact you for any creative needs they have. If you're not able to assist them, find someone who can. Build a list of qualified vendors who you can trust and who specialize in services that you can't provide. Be the go-to person for all things creative. They won't be able to pick a trim color without you.

5. LISTEN

Listen to everyone: to your team, clients, co-workers, peers, colleagues, boss, senior management and CEO. Solicit advice and encourage dialogue. Participate in a 360-degree performance evaluation on yourself and learn from the results. Be proactive and anticipate the next move. Be there before they come to you. Design a new stationery system or develop a new look for an existing promotional campaign and make a proposal to the department head. Create new packaging concepts for line extensions to your company's products. Find ways to contribute to initiatives your company is pursuing. Challenge the status quo and explore alternative solutions, whether you're assisting your clients or preparing your budget. By sharpening your active listening skills you'll become more receptive, gain a better understanding of your clients' needs and manage their expectations more effectively.

6. SHOW 'EM THE MONEY

Even if you don't manage the budget for your department, you should be aware of what stuff costs. And if you do manage the budget, the smartest thing you can do is operate your shop like it's your business and every dollar spent is your own. Show the value you bring to the table. If you don't charge back for your services, find a way to capture the savings you generate by comparing your internal costs with outside agency expenses. There are a number of affordable project-management software solutions that can assist you here. Preparing monthly and annual production reports that capture your activity and show your cost-effectiveness is essential to justifying your existence to the bean counters.

7. BE AN EXPERT

People come to you because of your talent, skills, experience and knowledge. Be confident and be prepared to back up your design choices with conviction and self-assurance. Remember, you're developing visual materials to support specific business goals and objectives, and if you take the time to really understand the work at hand and speak in business terms, eventually you'll earn the trust of your colleagues and clients—who will learn to respect your decisions and your work.

8. GET BACK IN TOUCH

You may find, over time, that your creative fire is not as hot and bright as it once was. Maybe the corporate culture is sucking the life out of you and you need to

come up for air. It took a broken foot for me to take five from the hamster wheel of hell and recharge my creative, personal and professional batteries. The creative soul is a fragile entity and requires special care—especially when thrown into the corporate environment. And when your everyday responsibilities require you to perform on demand and make magic on a daily basis, then sooner or later you'll be empty. You'll find yourself digging deeper and deeper into your creative well and coming up with less and less.

Now, I'm not suggesting that you go out and break some bones just to get time away from the office. But it would be a good idea to schedule some downtime. Catch up on your reading, take a walk, go to a movie, paint, learn how to play an instrument, wander, wonder or just vegetate. Anything that will get the creative juices flowing. The insatiable thirst you once had for creative expression may return, breathing huge breaths to fuel your curiosity. Ideas and thoughts that were previously inaccessible, undeveloped or unrealized will rise to the surface and come into focus like never before. It's up to you to find ways to keep yourself motivated so you can be in top form when you're at work. Staying inspired takes inspiration.

9. INTERSECT

Hop on the elevator and get off on a floor you've never been to and explore. Look for opportunities to partner with another department on a project. Make yourself available—for meetings, for conference calls, for lunch. Learn more about your company, its products, its services, and the departments and business groups that make it tick. By broadening your knowledge base, you'll become more valuable to your internal stakeholders because you'll have a better understanding of their needs and how your team can support their business goals and objectives. And the more you learn about how your company works, the more opportunities you'll have to get work from your company. As an in-houser, you're exposed to a wider range of project types and have the opportunity to interact with more people than you would on the outside. So take advantage. Explore. Your adventures may lead you to some engaging personal and professional intersections.

10. BE PASSIONATE

Believe in what you're doing, and others will believe in you. Your passion will help inspire and motivate your team to do better work, boost morale, increase productivity and help build successful client relationships. Along the way, share your knowledge and a bit of yourself as well. And don't forget to smile. **HOW**

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» WEB EXTRA

Check out Andy Epstein's new blog for in-house designers. Epstein and Arnowitz co-founded In-Source, which provides resources and advocacy for in-house creative management. blog.inhowseconference.com