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Advancing Your Career in a Standstill Economy

Like other professionals today, you may be feeling stymied in your current position. Perhaps you're eager to move into a role with greater responsibility and pay, but in today's stagnant economy, there is less job mobility. In addition, the slumping stock market may be deterring some older professionals from acting on once-envisioned retirement goals, meaning that turnover in upper-rung positions has slowed. As a result, the options for moving either "up" or "out" are increasingly limited.

What can a career-minded legal administrator do in this environment? Since you probably don't want to check your ambition at the office door, you'll have to make the best of your current situation. Here are some suggestions for moving your career forward even when the wheels of advancement have temporarily halted.

Find a niche and fill it. In most offices, motivated legal administrators can find additional roles or responsibilities to voluntarily assume. This could be something long term in nature, such as starting up a firmwide community volunteer program, or spearheading a more defined project, such as the adoption of new legal software. Make it your goal to find an area of need that is going unfulfilled, ideally something that complements your interests and abilities. Not only will this provide you with a new challenge, but it will allow you to build your resume at the same time.

Pursue continuing professional education. Your career trajectory may have hit a bump in the road, but this doesn't mean your professional learning has to also be derailed. Plentiful opportunities exist to enhance your skills and abilities, whether you want to take advantage of training through a professional association, enroll in a course at the local university or polish your soft skills through an organization such as Toastmasters International. If your firm has asked you to take on new responsibilities, it might even be willing to subsidize your continuing education endeavors.

Go the extra mile in your current role. Even if your position is not changing, you can do your part to enhance it. Fight against career complacency and stagnation by seeking smarter, better and faster ways to carry out your responsibilities and exceed others' expectations. Adopting this mindset will allow you to raise the perceived value of your job, even without a promotion. In addition, you'll position yourself for positive recognition – and possibly an advancement opportunity – when the economic tide turns.

Participate in professional groups. Getting involved in industry and business groups can be a good way to shore up your career in a down economy. By joining a professional association or similar organization, you can nurture your enthusiasm for your career, expand your circle of contacts and stay on top of trends in the legal field. Whether you're hoping to advance at your current firm or change employers when the economy

improves, being active in professional groups can help you lay the foundation for the next step in your career.

Upgrade your title. Assuming you continue to expand your role and responsibilities, consider asking your boss for an enhanced title that more accurately reflects the nature of your current position. If you've gradually taken on additional management tasks in a growing number of areas, for instance, it might be appropriate to change your title from office manager to chief legal administrator. Although the upgraded title may not be associated with a new position – in fact, there may not be a higher rung to move to – it does signal career advancement, allowing you to bolster your professional clout and your resume. Moreover, in tough economic times, bosses are more likely to oblige a request for a more impressive title than to offer a significant pay increase.

During a recessionary period, the best thing you can do for your career is to focus on expanding your skills and abilities and seek to enhance your current role. This approach will allow you to continue to grow professionally, even during a downturn. Sooner or later, the economy will rebound, and you'll be ideally positioned to take advantage of the opportunities that emerge.