Put out to pasture and only given grunt work: How do I show my value?

Question: “Last year I became ill shortly after I was given a new assignment. I was gone about two months and then returned to work eager to continue my assigned responsibilities. The day I reported back to work, my new responsibilities were taken away and I was reassigned to grunt work, basically “put out to pasture.” My title and salary remain the same, so the company could not be accused of discrimination. I am about four years from retirement. I like the company, and I don't want to go on the job market at this point. I have given essential services and skills to the company for 13 years. No one else in the admin staff has the particular knowledge or skill set I have. I have offered to train or coach the others so that they can carry on when I retire, but no one seems interested. Is there anything I can do to stay as valued and appreciated as I was before my illness? Or is my only option to write an admin manual covering the knowledge and skills I would like to pass on?” — Caroline N. Packard

Comments

Maybe they felt the assignment had to carry on, at first they obviously thought you were capable of completing the task but then were not available. I would think that your manager felt the tasks needed to be completed and at the moment wants to keep you as an employee until the next assignment because they do value your capabilities. It could just be an unfortunate situation that could not be helped. I would talk to them about how you feel and they will probably do the same in return. Just be patient.

Posted by: | August 15, 2008 at 01:13 PM

Your comment - “I have offered to train or coach the others so that they can carry on when I retire, but no one seems interested. Is there anything I can do to stay as valued and appreciated as I was before my illness? Or is my only option to write an admin manual covering the knowledge and skills I would like to pass on?”

This is a terrible situation! This company should be ashamed of themselves, but considering today's world where corporations do not care about their employees but the almighty dollar, I would try to work through your current job, and WOULD NOT write the manual. They are not doing you any favors and actually have demoted a good employee from an illness and job you currently hold is obvious how much they care about you!

Posted by: CMW Baltimore | August 15, 2008 at 01:18 PM

Your last sentence is the key to your situation. A procedure manual would be a valuable asset to the company. You are being paid the same amount as before, therefore, you have not been demoted. You can make a contribution and earn your pay at the same time. Everyone in our office has to write procedures telling how to
do everything they do. That way if someone is run over by a bus their job can still be done by someone else or a new hire. Go write a manual you can be proud of.

Posted by: Darrel | August 15, 2008 at 01:50 PM

Caroline, that is so sweet of you to still consider writing the manual after the way the company treated you. If you feel they will put it to good use, I would go ahead and write the manual. But, if you don't think it will, I would not even bother. I'm sorry this happened to you.

I would simply make myself available to offer assistance in any future projects. Once they see your skills in action, they will take notice and possibly start giving you better projects to work on.

For now, keep your head up and be thankful you still have your title and salary. Good luck.

Posted by: Sandy | August 15, 2008 at 02:26 PM

I think it is unfortunate what happened to you. However, I think it is imperative you take the "high road" in this situation and continue to do the job you were hired and are being paid to do. Sometimes you have to prove yourself, and unfortunately; sometimes you have to do it over and over. Yes, your illness was unavoidable, but look at it from the flip side - easier said than done, I know. Two months is a long time to be away, and someone had to do these assignments while you were out, and since you were not there to do them, someone else got the opportunity. Instead of letting this get you down, I would suggest you create an exceptional procedures manual and then present to your supervisor. Demonstrate your initiative and the benefit to the company. Taking initiative is remembered, and might help you get some of your higher level responsibilities back. Remember, there is never anything wrong with marketing yourself and this is your chance.

Posted by: Karen | August 15, 2008 at 05:15 PM

I feel for you as I feel I am also getting "put out to pasture" but I'm sure it is because of my age and younger admins are in the office now. They ask for my advice a lot and they seem to appreciate the skills and knowledge that I have acquired. I have not been demoted in title or salary, just in duties. Frankly, the stress level is less so when you think about it, my days are much more pleasurable.

I, too, am in the middle of creating a procedure manual because one day I will retire; plus when I take vacation, they will have the instructions at their fingertips. Some days my manual helps to keep me busy when there aren't enough other duties available.

There are many people out of work, I am very fortunate to have a job and a very well paying one at that! To rock the boat now at my age would be committing employment suicide. Please don't feel bad that some of your assignments are gone, take pride in what you have done and in what you still have to offer. On the other hand, the younger generation can teach you a lot about the latest technology advances, for instance. It's a fascinating and fast paced world out there. Enjoy it until you are ready to retire.

Posted by: Linda | August 15, 2008 at 05:30 PM

I am very sorry about your situation. What I learned is that I feel much better about myself when I take the high
road. It is not about doing them a favor or being appreciated, it is about staying true to myself and doing the best job I can each day.

You received great advice from Linda and Karen as well as the first writer.

I would also talk to my supervisor. "I would like to contribute and be of help. Could you give me projects to help the team and continue to use my skills? I feel since I returned that I am not valuable and would like to change that, can you help me? As a start, I have created this procedure manual, or you could say, I have a suggestion, I could create a procedure manual to start with, but is there anything else that you think would be more helpful instead?" Chances are they would welcome your support and there has been a misunderstanding. Communication is often the best healer.

Most importantly stay positive. Enjoying your work and the people around you, is very important to a healthy life. Be proud of your contributions and hold your head up high.

Posted by: | August 16, 2008 at 01:18 PM

I am so sorry for your situation, this even happens at our agency with me and another person. I was ill and though I kept up with my work it was not of the quality the agency expected. It has taken over a year to get back to where I was and it was my attitude and actually setting up a meeting with the Director to express ways to get back in the flow. The other person is still grumbling about the raw deal he got but and I even told him you have to remain positive negativity will only make people move away from you not draw near you. Please do a personal assessment of your skills but also your personality before and after you got sick has it changed? If so how do you get it back, do you want that other person back. Communicate ways you can be of benefit to yourself and to the powers that be.

Posted by: Jo | August 17, 2008 at 09:04 AM

I feel for you. I was out on maternity leave for two months and when I came back, I was treated very differently from before I left. Management was just paranoid that I’d leave for an extended time in the future, so they gave me a two-month deadline to train the other admin in the department on what I did. I tried, and the other admin quit (citing stress as the reason). I ended up training her replacement and explained that the responsibilities were going to shift around from time to time. This went well. Then came the directive to halt all of my training when it came time to show her my responsibilities. This was several months ago, and it seems I’m back where I was before I left for leave. Maybe just waiting and continue to be willing to do what they ask you to do will help.

Posted by: Diane Johnson-Hung | August 18, 2008 at 12:35 PM

May I suggest that you read the book, "A New Earth" (which was featured on Oprah within the last year). You're feeling that WHO you are is directly equated to your job and what has/has not happened. In reality, your job has nothing to do with who loves you, how valuable you are to the world, your quality of life, etc. It's your 'ego' that wants/needs the acknowledgement from others to feel worthy. I can say with 100% confidence that after I read only the first 3 chapters of this book, my entire view of life changed - for the better. Yours will too! ;)

Posted by: Anonymous | August 22, 2008 at 01:54 PM
Ditto on the comments from Linda and Karen. Remain positive. Show that you are capable of doing what you are doing and more. Since you may have more free time on your hands than before you left, offer to take on new projects. I took an extended leave for maternity (11 1/2 weeks) and when I came back, lo and behold, they got along great without me. In the back of my head I wish they wouldn't have, but people adapt, adjust as needed when forced to. When I returned I was no longer called up to do some "petty" duties as people figured out how to do them on their own. I was free to take on additional responsibilities. The procedure manual is a great idea - do it. Don't treat others as they may be treating you...treat them better. That will speak volumes.

**Posted by: Holly | August 22, 2008 at 02:14 PM**

I'm an older working person (officially a "senior" myself. You certainly should talk to your supervisor along the lines of: I still have a lot to contribute to the company, how can we make the best use of my skills? Be sure to be positive. If the supervisor doesn't want to take you up on your offer, continue to do your job, see what you can learn from the younger admins, and start preparing yourself for retirement. Go on-line and start researching areas of interest. You definitely do not want to give your supervisor any opportunity to lay you off. It's hard enough for a young person to get a good job in today's economy, and you need to keep your health & other benefits until you are ready to retire. Just keep a positive attitude and don't consider yourself to be "out to pasture" (which is negative) but "currently on another assignment" (which is positive).

**Posted by: Anon | August 22, 2008 at 02:20 PM**

Keep your head up and stay positive for this too shall pass.

**Posted by: Shea | August 25, 2008 at 08:05 AM**

I think that your employer could have handled this more professionally. You obviously were not planning on being sick and missing a great deal of work - therefore you could not plan ahead for covering your new responsibilities etc. They should have set up a meeting for your first or second day back and talked over with you how the responsibilities you had been given have been re-distributed and what they expect from you now.

Perhaps things went well with whomever covered them for you and your employer has decided to wait until the next new thing to give it to you to let you re-acclimate to working after your illness. They SHOULD HAVE met with you though!

Hold your head high and ask them for a meeting. Explain that you are doing everything asked of you to the best of your ability but want them to know that you are willing and ready to take on more and that you appreciate their helping you through a difficult time.

Whatever you do don't tell them you have too much time on your hands or you could find yourself unemployed like so many others these days. Keep your cool and try to work with them.

As far as the manual. I guess you could suggest compiling a manual for the office in case another such situation comes up - but perhaps suggest doing it for everyone's responsibilities and you would be the compiler so you don't sound like an ego-maniac who thinks her job is more important than others'.

Good Luck!