

# Mergers & Apprehensions: Navigating Coming Change

BY TODDI GUTNER

Learning that your company is merging with another—or being bought—is one of the most anxiety-provoking events in a career. Two companies might work better as one, but job cuts often follow such a marriage.

Indeed, some 36,918 employees were laid off as the result of a merger or acquisition in 2007 and an additional 25,101 in the first five months of this year—13,841 in May alone, including many of the



jobs lost at Bear Stearns after it was purchased by J.P. Morgan Chase—according to outplacement-consulting firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas. But take heart: There are things you can do to position yourself during the transition.

■ **Communicate regularly with your boss.** Start talking to your managers early—and keep it up—in the days after the announcement. Be direct and ask your boss what he or she knows about the future direction of the organization and your team's role in it. Request updates rather than relying on the rumor mill.

■ **Research the new landscape.** Study up on the company that yours is merging with or that is taking over your company. Learn all you can about its corporate structure and culture. Then you can discern whether your position is in an area the company wants to build up—or one that is duplicated—in the new organization. “Figure out where the [talent] gap is in the new organization and then devise a way to fill that gap,” says Andrea Eisenberg, managing director of career services at Partners in Human Resources International.

■ **Assess your options.** Decide

whether the new organization is a place that meets your own career needs. You may not like the “new way” things are done or you may see evidence that you will lose the career potential you once had. At the same time, “the new organization gives you a whole new clean slate and the opportunity to create a future for yourself,” says John A. Challenger, chief executive of Challenger, Gray & Christmas. You might find a new type of position that could take you into another part of the business or teach you additional skills.

■ **Be visible and advertise your expertise.** People who have not worked with you are assessing your value to the new organization. The only way for them to know what you have accomplished and your areas of expertise is for you to tell them. “Get the word out about what you’ve done and what your skills are,” says Mr. Challenger. “Standing out is one way to ensure your survival.” Think of ways your skills can apply to ventures the new firm holds dear—you will also avoid being seen as someone who doesn’t like the change.

■ **Network inside and outside.** The more people who know you within the organization, the more who may advocate for you as new positions emerge. You will want to “work extremely hard at building your old and new relationships whether you stay with the organization or not,” says Mr. Challenger.

■ **Be realistic.** If your options are slim at the new organization, start your search for a new job as soon as possible. Get your résumé ready and polish your interview skills. If you decide to stay, you may be asked to reapply for your current job. Don’t take it personally. “Prepare your résumé as if you were leaving the company,” says Mr. Challenger.