

Coping with a Layoff: Re-Launch Your New Future

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In life there is suffering and none of us can escape it. The most gut wrenching type of suffering is the shock we experience with a significant loss. Sometimes we can see it coming; sometimes the shock brings us to our knees. While the most painful losses are the death of a loved one and the most complicated losses occur with divorce, losing a job can be one of the most devastating personal crises of a lifetime. From Wall Street to “Main Street” the last decade has produced increasing numbers of job layoffs for managers and workers alike. As corporate restructuring continues, the pace of permanent layoffs is expected to accelerate. Although the financial decline associated with a job loss is most often the primary issue, the blow to ones ego can be even more difficult to face. The many losses associated with a job layoff include:

- Loss of income
- Loss of self esteem
- Loss of purposeful activity
- Loss of routine
- Loss of predictability and sense of security
- Loss of plans for the future

Like any other catastrophe, a job loss crisis can have a silver lining and present an opportunity for growth. It is important not to take on the role of a victim, but embrace the attitude of a survivor. With any loss there are emotional hurdles that must be negotiated before you can begin to re-launch your career.

Uniqueness of Every Loss

Every relationship we have is unique and this includes the relationships we form with our employer, co-workers and the attachment we have to our position. Therefore, the grief we experience when a relationship is lost is also unique. The belief that there are specific stages of grief that must be negotiated is false and can often unhinge the healing process. Although the pain, fear and doubt accompanying a layoff is distinctive, there are several universal strategies that can help you boost your self-confidence, mobilize your resources and jump start your job search.

Catch Your Breath and Deal with Your Feelings

Grieving and mourning are verbs that emphasize the need for movement in coping with loss. It is natural to feel angry, hurt, scared, discouraged and even depressed when experiencing the loss of a job. Ignoring or stuffing these emotions will not help in moving through them. Examples of how we ignore or stuff our feelings include:

- Eating too much
- Not talking about what we're feeling
- Using alcohol or drugs to numb feelings
- Not allowing yourself to cry
- Hiding behind "busy work"
- Isolating in front of the T.V. or computer
- Making decisions in anger
- Feeling like you've failed when most likely you haven't

In order to fully negotiate feelings of loss it is important to acknowledge them and move through them. Ignoring these negative emotions and failing to move through them will only ensure that they will remain and sap the energy needed to launch a new job search. Talking with others, sharing your frustration with others, journaling your experience, crying if you need to and attending networking groups are all tools that can help you manage the feelings of loss.

Movement

When experiencing a job layoff, it is absolutely normal to feel somewhat defeated, in shock and generally lethargic. These are natural symptoms of loss that have a tendency of slowing us down. Every illness, neurosis and affliction we experience in life has the same goal of trying to slow us down, create isolation and stop us from moving. Movement is life and lack of movement will lead us to death. When we stop moving completely, we die, therefore, creating movement when rebounding from a job loss is essential. Movement of any degree is the best medicine to avoid opening the door to greater physical or emotional illness. Examples of creating movement include:

- **Immediately** – get a separation letter from HR
- Clarify benefits – severance pay, references, outplacement coaching
- Clarify health insurance coverage and follow up
- Register for unemployment compensation
- Follow a daily schedule – work on resumes, make calls, do research
- Make personal business cards for networking
- Incorporate exercise into your daily routine
- Avoid consumption that will slow you down, excessive eating, drinking, etc
- Utilize the depth of information available on the internet, Career Builder, Monster, etc.

Don't Isolate Yourself

As humans we are innately social beings. Physical and emotional health can be directly correlated to the degree of social interest we have in life. We do not thrive when we are isolated and it is the primary characteristic of all illness to move us in a direction of

isolation. The primary demon that is unleashed from a lay-off is the demon of isolation. In one moment we are removed from the stream of a busy working community and the sense of contribution that goes along with work. Linger too long in isolation and not only will you not find success, but your job skills and marketability my also lose their luster. Initiate some of these steps to help create movement towards social interest during your job search:

- Share what has happened with people you know
- Ask others for job leads
- Attend networking meetings
- Cultivate leads by making inquiry phone calls
- Have lunch with friends
- Incorporate exercising with others in to your routine
- Interview, it is all practice
- Don't trash your former employer or speak badly of others. It only pushes people away.

Thinking

Negative thinking is counter productive to creating movement in your job search. In fact, the greatest obstacle we face in any crisis may be when our thinking becomes dominated by negative beliefs. The power of positive thinking is an important tool for overcoming a loss and presenting yourself in the best light. If you don't believe that you are going to succeed in an interview or job application, then you have failed before you've begun. Common thoughts that must be challenged include:

- "I've failed"
- "I'm all alone in this"
- "I don't know how to interview"
- "I'm under qualified"
- "I'm only qualified to work in my industry"
- "I'll never get my previous salary"

Negative thought patterns are common, but must be challenged. The primary step to challenging negative thoughts is to get them out of your head. If you counter balance negative thoughts with more positive thoughts, but do this only in your head, the end result is often continued negative thinking. To find success you must perform a little brain surgery and carve out the negative thoughts by writing them down. Once the negative thoughts are recorded you can write more positive, realistic, counterbalancing thoughts that challenge your negative beliefs. I recommend that you record three positive thoughts to counter balance each negative thought. For example:

Belief: "I've failed"

Reality: 1.) My lay off was not based on performance.

2.) The whole company is struggling, this was a business decision.

3.) The only failure would be in giving up and not re-launching my career.

By utilizing this technique you will end up with flash cards of negative beliefs and counter balancing thoughts. By frequently reviewing these cards you will undo and eliminate the negative thoughts and free yourself up for more positive action.

Look Ahead to Your New Future

Strangely, being laid off can be a good thing. I have made a career out of working with individuals who stay in jobs that they don't like because they've lost inertia, get too busy, aren't unhappy enough to make a change, or their learned helplessness has left them immobilized. A layoff pushes us "out of the nest" and in to an unexpected job search. It is a test of our character and a chance to overcome adversity. In many cases it becomes an opportunity to re-launch your career towards a future with a better job, more money and greater happiness.