



Job Loss

JOB LOSS

No matter what you may call it... laid off, terminated, dismissed, outplaced, fired... the experience is a hurtful one. It is not unusual that you may feel discouraged, frustrated, isolated, fearful and depressed. You may feel overwhelmed and disoriented. You may feel worthless. You may feel embarrassed. You may feel like a failure. You may feel like someone has pulled the rug out from underneath you. After losing your job, you may experience any or all of the typical emotions associated with any kind of loss, including the initial shock, the immediate anger, the subsequent grief, and finally an acceptance of your situation.

Shock... You may feel stunned or surprised that this has happened. You may have feelings of disbelief or denial.

Anger... You may feel that you have been betrayed. You may have feelings of resentment, bitterness, rage, and fury. You may feel like blaming or criticizing. You may feel like screaming.

Grief... You may feel sadness over the loss of friends and co-workers. You may have feelings of yearning. You may feel discouraged, depressed, or in despair. You may feel like crying.

Acceptance... Finally, you get to the point of adaptation and a willingness to get on with your life. You feel a sense of resolve and a desire to focus on future possibilities. You're ready to move forward.

TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE

"In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity."

-ALBERT EINSTEIN

"Getting the ax hurts. It's a slap in the face. It feels like an attack on who you are and all you've done. Yesterday you were safe, secure, you belonged, and the future was promising. Today, you're out. You're on your own -- no safety, no security, you don't belong, and the future is scary."

-DAHLSTROM / *Surviving A Layoff*

"Involuntary job loss is a fact of life today. Being fired is so common that the word has fallen into disuse. *Outplacement* is what it's now called. As common as it has become, and no matter what it's called, it will still always be one of life's truly traumatic experiences."

-CHRISTOPHER KIRKWOOD / *Your Services Are No Longer Required*



"Losing your job through no fault of your own can wipe you out emotionally. How do you find the energy to search for work? How do you deal with your anger? How can you be pleasant, relaxed, and self-confident in an interview when you don't feel that way?"

- AL SIEBERT / *The Survivor Personality*

"When one door closes, another opens; but we often look so long and so regretfully upon the closed door that we do not see the one which has opened for us."

-ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL

"I've learned that getting fired can sometimes be the best thing that can happen to you."

-H. JACKSON BROWN, JR / *Live & Learn & Pass It On*

"Every exit is an entry somewhere else."

-TOM STOPPARD

LAID OFF

In the wake of a mass layoff or downsizing, and the subsequent unemployment that follows, a range of emotional reactions and realizations may result.

"I can't believe this has happened."

"I'm not sure the reality has sunk in."

"I gave my life to this company and this is how they treat me."

"I was angry, hurt, hysterical. I couldn't stop crying. I threw my severance packet on the floor."

"There's going to be some anger, bitterness, lots of sorrow."

"It isn't fair what they're doing to us. It just isn't fair."

"We're on an emotional rollercoaster."

"It's okay to grieve. It's okay to cry about it."

"Looking for a new job is a job in itself."

"It may be the best thing that ever happened in our lives."

SURVIVING THE LOSS

Among a variety of life-altering events, such as death in the family, divorce, and serious illness, losing your job ranks among the highest in stress-causing situations. Job loss can have a profound effect on your emotional well-being. Being separated from one's job is extremely difficult. Many of us closely identify ourselves by what we do for a living. When the job is taken away, we can lose track of who we are and even why we are. Emotional issues aside, a number of practical issues must be addressed. We must determine how long our financial resources will sustain us. We must also decide if a career change is in order. Then we must begin to plan for the future.

Although loss of income is serious, the blow to one's ego and self-esteem is even more difficult to face... and the loss of a daily routine, the loss of purposeful activity, the loss of predictability and sense of security. However, with loss comes opportunity. And like any other traumatic event, job loss presents an opportunity for growth and discovery. Commitment and diligence are required to transform present pain into future positive outcomes. There are several emotional stages you must work through to have the positive frame of mind you need to re-enter the workplace and recognize opportunities as they appear.



RECOVERING GRACEFULLY

It is time for you to consider how best to get back on your feet and move forward. How do you begin to pick up the pieces and bounce back?

You may want to begin by doing whatever you can to at least get what is owed you. Even though your head may be spinning, make sure you ask your employer about severance pay, vacation pay, medical insurance, and so on. If the employer does not offer you any of these, try to negotiate some. Take advantage of absolutely everything your employer offers you in a severance package, including career transition workshops, psychological counseling, health benefits, and severance pay. Initially, you might be too upset and proud to participate in any of these programs. But, ultimately you'll realize you might benefit from the support these offerings can provide.

As with any loss, there will be a recovery period. Feelings of anger or sadness may last for a couple of weeks or more. Give yourself time to grieve the loss, and express your feelings in healthy ways so they will pass more quickly.

TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

Staying motivated and keeping grounded is key. Try to maintain a positive attitude. Remember, this is only temporary. You will eventually get out of this predicament.

Take care of your mental and physical health. Eat well and exercise to stay fit and lower stress. Get proper sleep, and stay away from drugs and alcohol. You can join a support group, keep a journal or seek counseling.

Stay active. Get out of the house. Talk to people. Go for walks. Go to the gym. Maintain hobbies and social activities. Take time to enjoy yourself. Establishing a firm daily routine can help you stay in focus, reduce stress, and maintain your mental health.

Be particularly careful with your finances during this time. Create a budget with your family, and stick to it. If you have debt, figure out how you're going to afford your payments. If you think you may run into trouble, consult a consumer credit counseling agency.

Don't panic. Assess where you stand. Try to remain as calm as you can and see exactly what the situation is. Ask yourself: How much money do we have in the bank? How much are our monthly bills? How much am I receiving for severance? What do we need to modify in the budget?

And stay determined and diligent in your job search, following up on every possible lead.

SUPPORT SYSTEM

Begin networking immediately. Use your available support system. Contact all the people you know and request their help. Update them about your situation. Don't close yourself off to them. Now is a time to ask for help.



You may feel embarrassed or ashamed by what happened. Do not let that negative thinking stop you from getting emotional support. Ask your network to please keep their eyes and ears open for any employment opportunities that they might hear about. Your friends and acquaintances can be very helpful in brainstorming ideas and circulating your name. And it's very important to have a support system of friends, colleagues, former co-workers, neighbors, and family members who can motivate and encourage you.

You might need to not only find new long term employment, but to also find a temporary job to pay your immediate bills. Until you find a suitable fulltime permanent job, working part time can generate income and provide you with a schedule that allows you to go on job interviews.

Open your mind to different jobs. You need to cast a wide net, so don't just look for jobs exactly like your last one. Being too focused on one particular job may decrease your chances of finding work.

TIPS TO CONSIDER

Leaving a job is often upsetting, whether you were laid off, fired or decided to quit to your own. You may have trouble remembering to do the right thing. Try to control your temper as much as possible. Here are things you should avoid doing.

Don't tell off your boss and co-workers, even if you think they deserve it. When you leave your job, your emotions may be running high. You may want to tell your boss or co-workers what you really think of them. Don't do it, even if you feel justified. You never know who you will meet down the road and who you may have to work with one day.

Don't damage company property or steal something. You may feel you were mistreated by your employer and you may be really angry. However, vandalism and theft are criminal offenses. Not only will your professional reputation be damaged by your actions, you could end up in jail.

Don't forget to ask for a reference. If you include this job on your resume, so you should try to make sure you get a good reference in writing. Especially if your parting is involuntary and due to a layoff, you are in a good position to request a letter of reference from your supervisor. It'll be one good way for your employer to make it up to.

Don't badmouth your employer to a prospective employer when you go on a job interview. Don't say anything negative about your organization, supervisor, or co-workers. It will be a bad reflection on you and do more to tarnish your image than theirs. Try to hide any resentment or anger. Your prospective boss will wonder what caused your relationship with your prior employer to sour and will suspect that you could have been at fault.

FAULTLESS TERMINATION

If there is a silver lining to being laid off, it is the realization that your dismissal was faultless. A faultless termination takes place when a company is downsized or a position is eliminated. In the case of the resulting layoff, there is no wrongdoing whatsoever on the part of the employee.

People are usually laid off for being in the wrong place at the wrong time in an organization which has decided it needs to cut expenses.

Don't expect logic in who gets laid off and who doesn't, which departments survive and which don't. There is often no discernable logic involved. It's just the luck of the draw, and it is not a personal failure, so don't let it destroy your confidence.

You are in a favorable position as you go out into the job market. You left your job in good standing. You were not dismissed due to incompetence, poor performance, or misconduct. When asked why you left your last job, you can reply without hesitation or embarrassment that your termination was completely involuntary and not the result of your performance. You do not need to hide the fact that you have been laid off. Most employers will know that your effectiveness at the job had little to do with your job loss.

Leaving a job under no-fault circumstances gives you a real advantage that most other job seekers lack. You are in a better situation than those who have been fired due to poor performance. Being fired has a negative perception that being laid off does not have.

Don't lose sight of this rare advantage. Do not do anything to sabotage your job search efforts. In interviews, speak in positive terms about the important functions you performed and the valuable experience you gained. Don't criticize your former employer or make any disparaging or resentful remarks. Instead, use your recent employment to enhance your employability.

In networking events and interviews, be as affirming and upbeat as you can be. In discussing the company that laid you off, good phrases include "I learned a lot there," "I had some important responsibilities," "I had the opportunity to hone my skills," and "I worked with some great people."

EMPLOYABILITY

In the wake of a layoff, people begin to realize that dependence on the organization is obsolete and loyalty to the organization no longer guarantees job security. As workplaces are reshaping themselves to survive in response to tough economic times, millions have lost their jobs. Today, and for the foreseeable future, people's employability lies in their own hands.

Employers are beginning to admit to themselves and their employees that they can't guarantee permanent jobs. An employment guarantee suggests that a company will always have a job available for an employee. In today's world, this is no longer a reasonable guarantee. The volatile economy and the incredible pace of business today prohibit any group from offering anyone a rock-solid guarantee of a job for life.

And while employers can't promise job security or lasting employment, they can at least offer an employability guarantee. An employability guarantee is quite different. When a company offers a guarantee of employability, it promises to provide employees with every possible opportunity for professional improvement, so if their jobs are ever eliminated, they will be so employable they can easily find work in another department or another company.

While you are working for that organization, you will have the opportunity to gain experience and develop talents that will serve you well with that company or as you move on. Good organizations can offer a meaningful and enriching experience that serves to develop the skills and competencies of their employees. In such companies, the experience you gain can be seen as a way of insuring life-long employability beyond your current employment.

READY TO GO FORWARD

With the renewed sense of determination that comes from an honest and healthy reflection on your emotional state and the advantage of good solid preparation and practical resources, you should be ready to go forward. You can be empowered to manage your transition in a manner that allows you to the optimum control over your situation so that stress and frustration can be greatly reduced. You do not have to be at the mercy of the job market.

In order to get started, you might want to consider the tools you will need to manage a successful transition:

Self-Assessment... Job Market Information... Job Search Strategies... Networking Techniques...
Prospecting Techniques... Prospect List... Resume... Cover Letter... Follow Up Techniques...
References... Interview Skills... Interview Prep Sheet... Interview Attire... Thank You Letter...
Negotiation Techniques.

MORE RESOURCES

Recommended Books:

“Career Comeback: Eight Steps to Getting Back on Your Feet When You’re Fired, Laid Off, or Your Business Venture Has Failed,” by Bradley Richardson (Broadway, 2004, \$19). It addresses each stage of the loss of a job, from negotiating the severance package, and setting up financial and emotional support systems.

“The Job Loss Recovery Guide: A Proven Program for Getting Back to Work Fast!,” by Lynn Joseph (New Harbinger Publications, 2003, \$14.95). Recommended for someone feeling unable to take the steps he or she knows are needed to recover, get support, get finances in shape and look for another job.

“Fired, Laid Off or Forced Out: A Complete Guide to Severance, Benefits and Your Rights When You’re Starting Over,” by Richard C. Busse (Sphinx Publishing, 2005, \$14.95). This book is written by a lawyer who addresses legal issues related to pre-termination and termination.

Recommended Websites:

About Career Planning: Coping With Job Loss

http://careerplanning.about.com/od/jobloss/a/job_loss.htm

Love To Know: Stress Management and Managing Job Loss

http://stress.lovetoknow.com/Managing_Job-Loss_Stress

Riley Guide: Coping With Job Loss

<http://www.rileyguide.com/cope.html>

Family Corner: Job Loss Survival Guide

<http://www.familycorner.net/jobloss/index.htm>

Vidaville: Bounce Back From Job Loss

<http://www.vidaville.com/html/Bounce-Back-From-Job-Loss-p-16161.html>

Help Guide: Job Loss and Unemployment Stress

http://helpguide.org/life/unemployment_job_loss_stress_coping_tips.htm

Intercom Magazine: Dealing With Job Loss

<http://www.w-edge.com/articles/jobloss.htm>

Pink Slip Slump: Inspiration & Expert Advice

<http://www.first30days.com/losing-your-job/articles/the-pink-slip-slump.html>

Improving My Life: How to Deal With Losing Your Job

<http://improvingmylife.blogspot.com/2006/08/how-to-deal-with-losing-your-job.html>

Career Confidence: Job Market Success

<http://alabamaconnection.org/MLCAREER>

FINAL THOUGHTS

“Remember that there is nothing stable in human affairs; therefore, avoid undue elation in prosperity, or undue depression in adversity.”

-SOCRATES

“Every success, every failure, if we let them, helps us in the future. We may not be able to see how an experience helps right now but if we keep our eyes open we will. Losing a job is a stressful time but within that stress is opportunity. What a wonderful time to reevaluate what you want from your career and life. Our road to our dreams is not a straight path but one with twists and turns. Keep learning and moving and you'll get there!”

-LEANNA FREDRICH

“The greatest part of our happiness depends on our dispositions, not our circumstances.”

-MARTHA WASHINGTON

“Ask yourself... What is good about this situation? What have you learned from your past experiences that is helping you now? What step will you take today to get closer to your goals? What do you really want in your next job?”

-LEANNA FREDRICH

“Success is how high you bounce when you hit bottom.”

-GEORGE S. PATTON

“The obstacle is the path.”

-ZEN SAYING



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