



Surviving a Layoff

Losing a job is on the top ten list of life's greatest stressors. Our job, whether we like it a lot or not so much, impacts almost every aspect of our lives. If we work full-time, we are at our jobs more of our waking time than anything else that we do. Regardless of whether it is full or part-time, a job provides us with an income, a daily routine, self-esteem, friendships, and familiar surroundings and for some, their identity. To lose a job through no choice of our own can send us into a whirlwind of emotions. Depending on where you are in your life, reactions to job loss can range from total devastation to elation.

Some of the initial emotions you may experience are shock, disbelief, numbness, denial, fear/dread, anger, anxiety and guilt. Others may feel relieved, hopeful and happy. People may also experience some physical reactions such as shortness of breath, chest pain or tightness, nervousness, insomnia or needing more sleep, gastro-intestinal upset, increase or loss of appetite, to name a few. You may find yourself not concentrating, daydreaming, pre-occupied, confused or forgetful.

But, you need to know that even though this job loss can seem like the end of the world for some, people do find other jobs. Some get more training and some even change careers. There is light at the end of this tunnel. Here are some steps you can take to survive the emotional peaks and valleys that you will no doubt experience as a result of a layoff.

- 1. Don't blame yourself!** Many people have a tendency to think they did something to deserve it, that they are at fault. Just remember, the decision to down size or close a company has nothing to do with your job performance. It has everything to do with the bottom line. Especially in bad economic times, companies are looking for any way they can cut costs. You may think, "If they really liked me, they wouldn't have chosen me." Not true. Again, it very well could be they are cutting staff based on seniority - either you were the last one hired or the long-term employee who is making more money. These are things over which you have no control and therefore, are not to blame for losing your job.
- 2. Be honest about your emotions.** Coming to terms with the fact that you are anxious, scared or angry is the first step in managing your emotions. Remember, these are normal reactions to a substantial change in your life. Identify which emotions are most prevalent for you and then try to figure out what exactly is making you feel this way. Are you telling yourself that there are no jobs out there? Challenge these thoughts by saying something like, "It is true there are a lot fewer job opportunities than there have been in the recent past, but there are still job openings on line and people are getting new jobs."
- 3. Tell your family and friends as soon as possible.** While this may be difficult to do at first, remember that those who care about you can be a tremendous support to you at this time and they could be great sources of job information. Spouses, partners and

children are affected by your job loss. Have a family meeting to discuss how to cope during this time and ask them for their ideas. Children also need to be reassured that the family will get through this if everyone works together. Let family and friends know where you are in your job search at any given time and what you need or don't need from them. Sometimes people don't know how to help you. Maybe you don't need somebody asking, "Have you gotten a job yet?" every time they see you. It can be a win-win for all if you can be specific about how they can help.

- 4. Examine your finances.** Take a good look at your expenses and your savings to determine how much you will need during your time of unemployment. In a difficult economy, you may want to plan for 3 to 6 months. By doing this exercise, you may relieve some of the financial anxiety you feel. And, if it makes your blood pressure soar, it could light a fire under your job search process. Either way, it's better to know where you stand financially.
- 5. Find out about health insurance.** If you and your family were covered by your company's health insurance, ask the company benefit manager about COBRA, which allows you to continue to participate in the medical plan for a specified period of time, but you pay 100% of your own premiums.
- 6. Stop watching or reading about the economy!** Listening to or reading stories about the current state of the economy can be very discouraging and depressing. The last thing you need right now is to feel negative or pessimistic. Those feelings can be pervasive and can spill over into an interview. Hiring managers want optimistic job candidates!
- 7. You've got a new job - Job search!!** Experts say working 20-30 hours a week on job search is the way to go. Planning your days and staying on track gives you structure and discipline and a feeling of being in control of your life at this time. Set daily and weekly goals to help keep you motivated.
- 8. Take care of yourself!!** This is SO important! Because this can be a stressful time, make sure you get enough rest, a good nutritious diet and enough exercise. It's really OK to pamper yourself now. You deserve it! Read that book you've wanted to read, go to a matinee or take an afternoon walk on a trail. Talk with close family and friends, let them show some support, and accept it!
- 9. Check out resources available to you.** If you are eligible for unemployment, be sure to contact your state unemployment office to apply for benefits. Experts say your best resource for finding a job is through the people you know. Over 60% of those who find a job have found it through networking. Also, there are numerous job search websites as well as search firms and agencies to help you find a job. Read about your line of work to keep you updated on what's happening or join a job seeker's support group. Don't forget job fairs and meetings where you may have opportunities to make new connections.
- 10. Know when to seek help.** It is normal to feel some intense emotions during this time of finding a job. But, if you feel the stress of unemployment has become too great or intense uncomfortable feelings have lasted too long or you have turned to alcohol or drugs to cope, you may wish to seek professional help. Remember Aurora EAP can help you with information or a referral to a professional counselor in your area. We are available 7

days a week, 24 hours a day. Call **800-236-3231** for confidential assistance.