

Coping With Job Loss

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Whether you've been downsized, given the "pink slip" or decided to bail out before you go nuts, coping with the loss of a job can be very difficult. When you ask most people to tell you something about themselves, they tell you what they do for a living. Work is a very important part of our lives. When your work is negatively affected, so is your self-image.

People who have lost a job go through a grieving process similar to that experienced during the loss of a family member — they are shocked, angry and depressed. Since many people aren't confident they know precisely what to do when they've lost a job, they can also feel helpless. This feeling increases the emotional turmoil they are already going through.

Losing a job doesn't just happen to the other person. At some point in your career, you will probably lose a job. Given the dynamics of our economy today, it may happen many times.

What can you do to better cope with the loss of your job when it does happen to you?

Focus Forward

When the job is gone, the job is over. Do yourself a favor and devote 100 percent of your time and effort to the future. Don't spend valuable time replaying things that happened during your last position. Those things are history. Every second you spend dwelling in the past is a second you are not fully living in the present and a second that is lost to the future.

Start by leaving the past behind — forgive your last company, boss, coworkers and, most importantly, yourself. No doubt both your past employer and you made mistakes. Take the lessons you've learned and move forward. When you are tempted to spend time dwelling on how you were mistreated, stop and make a list

of all the ways doing so will help you find a new job. You will find that the list is a very short one.

If You Aren't Careful, You'll Only Find A Job

Many people haven't thought seriously about all the career options available to them since they left school. Once started in a particular trade or industry, many people stay even if they are less than fulfilled in their careers. You have been given a gift of time to evaluate yourself, your life and your career. Now is the time to figure out what you are really looking for, so that you can search for "the" job that will allow you to be both successful and happy. To do this, you need to take time to ask a lot of serious questions about what you truly want.

Start by making a list of all the successes you've had. Don't limit yourself to work activities. Being as specific as possible, write down what skills you used to achieve each success. Are you a good listener? Are you able to analyze complex data? Next, figure out which of these skills you like to use.

You also need to ask yourself what geographic preferences you have, what corporate and personal values are important to you, how much money you need to make and everything you can think of that is an important factor in your life.

Your task now is to find the job that will allow you to use the skills that you like to use. Doing this also prevents you from repeating the mistakes of the past, of taking a job that didn't make you happy last time and won't make you happy this time. The process helps you find "the" job, not just "a" job.

Once you know what you truly want, it is much easier to find it.

Do The Research

You are now ready to start seriously looking for "the" job. One of the most effective ways of finding the job you want is called the "friendly inquiry" method. Instead of calling a friend and asking where you can find a job (and thereby putting them and you in an uncomfortable position), you call to ask what they can tell you about jobs requiring the use of the skills you want to use, about companies with the type of culture you are looking for, or numerous other issues you have highlighted as important to you.

By taking the role of researcher, you will find that there are more jobs and industries open to you than you might have thought. While you may have been a manager in the chemical industry for many years, this method may help you understand that your skills are perfectly suited to another type of job in an entirely new industry. These friendly inquiries can lead to introductions to others in the areas in which you have an interest, and ultimately to someone who has the job for which you are looking.

Do It Now

Sometimes people take a couple of weeks off after losing a job. They use this time to relax, do yard work or go on vacation. This is rarely advisable. When you lose your job, you are given an important project that must be done in a time sensitive manner — to find a new career. Work this new project as diligently as you would the job you hope to locate. Job search activity should fill at least eight hours each day, more at the beginning of the search.

Get A Coach

Find a minister, mentor, friend or outplacement professional who is willing to provide both good technical job search advice and encouragement during your career search. You are not looking not for a shoulder to cry on but for real, focused coaching to help you navigate the job market effectively. The ideal job search coach clearly understands the dynamics of the job market, how to find positions using both traditional and friendly inquiry methods and who will provide both emotional support and objective comment during the period of unemployment. A good coach can significantly increase the effectiveness of the search.

Stay Positive

After the tire of a man's brand new car blew out, he lost control of the car and ran head-on into a large tree. When the police arrived, they found the man sitting happily on the hood of his now totaled vehicle. When asked how he could be happy after wrecking his new car, he replied, "I can be upset that I've torn up my new car or I can be ok with it. Either way, this car is wrecked. I choose to be positive."

Whatever the cause of your unemployment, you have been given a valuable opportunity to do an in-depth exploration of your skills, interests and abilities. No doubt you will look back at your search with a sense of accomplishment. You will learn a lot and, maybe for the first time in your career, be able to steer yourself

toward the type of opportunity to which you are best suited and most interested. Treat this time as an opportunity and it will become one.

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