



## A Time of Crisis: Sudden Job Loss

In this difficult time of insecure financial markets and corporate restructuring, many people are finding themselves suddenly and unexpectedly out of a job. The loss of employment ranks high, along with death and divorce, as one of life's more unsettling events. Job loss acts as a social and financial stressor that may diminish feelings of self-worth and lead to depression, anxiety, and disruption in the family. Concerns over financial stability, professional competence and family security are paramount.

Many people feel shocked, devastated, and traumatized after a sudden job termination. These reactions are normal and represent the beginning of a grieving process that may also include anger, denial and depression. For most, however, the process will ultimately lead to acceptance and hope if life and personal priorities are kept in perspective.

First, and most important:

**Monitor your immediate emotional reactions so they do not overwhelm sound judgment.**

Second:

**Address your job loss right away; don't ignore it.**

Depression and anxiety over job termination can lead to inactivity and social withdrawal. Maintaining emotional support of family and friends, interest in daily activities and physical activity are essential during the transition period from unemployment to employment. Consider:

- ° Maintaining professional associations and contacts
- ° Beginning to look for a new job immediately. Consult professional contacts, friends, former employees and employers for potential leads
- ° Scheduling activities that give you a sense of accomplishment, concentrating on one task at a time
- ° Increasing physical activity and exercise. This will improve your mental outlook and emotional well-being, helping to alleviate stress and/or mild depression
- ° Practicing simple relaxation techniques to alleviate tension
- ° Eating well and getting enough sleep
- ° Recording your feelings and experiences in a journal
- ° Planning social activities with friends
- ° Renewing your spiritual life
- ° Maintaining hobbies
- ° Staying away from drugs and alcohol as a way to cope
- ° Taking time to enjoy yourself

During the time of unemployment, it is important to maintain a normal schedule and routine. Eat at regular times, go to sleep at your normal hour, get up in the morning and get dressed for the day. If handled well, the time you have can offer you the opportunity to rethink work-place choices and take on new and rewarding responsibilities.

# Key Components to Managing Your Job Loss

## When should you seek professional help?

For some, job loss triggers strong and seemingly overwhelming reactions. Feelings of inadequacy or self-blame can emerge. Factors that have been identified as intensifying negative reactions are a high degree of personal involvement with the job and concomitant domestic problems. If depression continues beyond a week or two, or if it interferes with your daily functioning, you should seek professional help. Some indications may be:

- If you feel trapped; feeling as though there is nowhere to turn.
- If you are worrying excessively and can't concentrate.
- If you are having continued difficulty sleeping, your eating habits have been negatively affected, or your relationships are suffering.
- If you find that past coping strategies are not effective in helping you through the event.
- If you feel deep despair and/or have suicidal thoughts Many people find that speaking to a mental health professional. or joining a support group with others who've experienced job loss increases their ability to cope and manage their feelings.

## How do you tell your family?

- Explain the loss of your job to your spouse or significant other first. With the help and support of your spouse or significant other, explain the situation to your children.
- Be reassuring that the family will make it through the crisis. This will demonstrate to children that a life crisis is surmountable and that positive outcomes can be anticipated.
- Keep communication open by answering questions frankly, in an age-appropriate way.
- Involve the entire family in strategizing how to accommodate to the changed lifestyle as increased budgeting is necessary while you are out of work.
- Have family conferences and create a budget with the suggestions from all members of your family on how to help conserve money.
- Keep major changes to a minimum and maintain household routines as much as possible.
- Understand the stress that each family member may be going through in reaction to your job loss.
- Recognize your emotions in order to reduce your reactivity and stay in control of your behavior.
- Help family members anticipate and formulate appropriate responses to questions from people outside the family.

## Maximize your financial resources:

- Realistically appraise your financial resources and decide what you can or can not manage.
- Conserve on finances to allow yourself as much time as possible to find a new job.
- Contact your creditors and inquire about temporarily reducing payments.
- Don't make rash financial or business decisions.
- Register with a temporary agency: this will provide you with a paycheck while allowing the flexibility to search for a permanent position.
- Check with your Human Resources Department about what benefits you are entitled to: pension, insurance, vacation pay, health coverage, etc.

## Moving beyond shock and malaise:

- Have patience and be kind to yourself.
- Acknowledge your frustrations and disappointments in seeking new employment.
- Remember that feelings of frustration and disappointment can result in a reduced energy level and/or a sense of low-morale: each day, take at least one positive step toward finding a solution or engage in positive, rewarding activities with family or friends.

## A Time for Optimism and Hope

The period between jobs can actually be a time of growth and renewal. Recognize the potential for new opportunities. You can emerge with increased self-knowledge, fresh career perspectives and refined priorities. Once you have come to terms with the loss of your job and the people you have left behind, you may experience new-found confidence and a sense of quiet expectation of the opportunities that lie ahead.

## Sources

Material is derived from Center for Trauma Program Innovation knowledge and clinical experience and from the following references:

*Coping with Job Loss*: Department of Career Services, American Chemical Society, 2000

*Surviving a sudden job loss*: Los Angeles Times, May 18, 2008

*Talking About Job Loss with Kids—How, When and What*: NYU Child Study Center, 2008

*After the Ax Falls: Researching the Psychological Impact of Job Loss Among Professionals*: The Ohio State University, 1982

## Additional Resources

<http://financecareers.about.com>

<http://psychcentral.com/lib/2006/coping-with-unexpected-job-loss/>



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