

HOW TO COPE WITH LOSING A JOB



Summary: *Here's how to cope with losing a job, which is often a very hard thing to deal with.*

You suspected it might be coming. You'd heard rumors about "lay-offs," "downsizing" or "organizational restructuring." And then, it finally happens. You receive notice that you've lost your job.

Even when forewarned, it's still almost always a shock when it actually happens. There's usually a sense of loss, as well as very real questions about the economic impact this will have, the changes it will bring for you and your family, and what you'll be facing to find a new job. You're experiencing a life transition that is becoming more common in today's often turbulent economy.

Our reactions to a job loss usually follow patterns similar to those experienced in response to other types of loss, such as a death or the ending of a relationship. It often starts as shock and denial, being unable to believe this has happened. One worker, for example, drove each day to the plant where he had worked, then sat in his car in the parking lot, despite the entire plant having been shut down.

The denial stage is often followed by anger. And while that anger's source may be those who took away your job, it's often directed at those closer to you. You may find yourself more edgy and more easily upset by the actions and words of family and friends.

Another stage many people go through is one of bargaining, a preoccupation with trying to get the old job back, even though that may be unrealistic and even undesirable. Many recently unemployed people also experience depression, a time of feeling sad and discouraged as they question their worth and abilities.

While none of these stages associated with job loss are pleasant, it's important to recognize that they are all quite normal. In fact, understanding that fact may make it easier and quicker to get through the job loss experience and on to accepting the loss and beginning to create a new work life.

It's also valuable to recognize that there are a number of things, we call them risk factors, that can make the loss of a job more traumatic. Losing a counter job at the local hamburger joint at age 18 is a different experience than being laid off from a company where you've worked for a long time and saw yourself as vital. Some of the factors that can magnify the sense of loss include your age, the length of your tenure with your company, your family's need for your income, your range of job skills and even how much of a workaholic you are (the bigger the workaholic, the stronger the sense of loss). All of these factors, and several more, help increase the stress you may experience when a job is lost.

But what can you do to cope with this taxing and burdensome experience of job loss? One starting point is to minimize any additional major life changes. Don't add to your stress levels by putting unnecessary new burdens on your life. In fact, there are definite advantages in trying to keep your life as normal as possible as you seek new employment. Maintain regular schedules, eat healthfully, exercise regularly, and continue normal contact and involvement with family and friends.

This is also a good time to set goals and to work toward meeting those goals. While losing a job does bring a sense of loss, it also brings an opportunity for a new beginning. Strengthen your network of family and friends, and seek out rewarding and fulfilling activities (special family projects, local volunteer work) as you institute that search for a new job. Allow yourself the time to "feel" your sense of loss (to be angry or sad as appropriate), but also recognize that this is a time to move on to new experiences.

If someone who has lost a job is finding it difficult to cope with and accept what has happened, a professional counselor can offer helpful assistance. Many employers provide employee assistance or outplacement counseling for laid off employees. Some counseling professionals are trained to work with unemployed individuals and their families. They can provide support, stress management tools, education, and empowerment, while also connecting individuals and their families to community resources such as health, financial, and employment assistance.