

## LOSING YOUR JOB: SURVIVAL STRATEGIES FOR STARTING OVER

### Getting Started

No matter whether you are suddenly laid off with no notice, or you know months in advance that your position is going to be eliminated, the actual event of losing your job can be a shock to your physical system, your emotional health, and, of course, your bank account. The steps you take as soon as you get a hint that your job is coming to an end will help cushion the impact of one of the most stressful times in your life.

The concept of “strategy” is extremely valuable at this period in your career. It invites you somehow to rise above your sensation of panic and, perhaps, the temptation to feel worthless in the marketplace. It will also help you take a new, bird’s-eye view of your life and career, and see the potential for ultimately better work and greater success. You should consider the following questions as you take important steps to turn this upsetting news into a success story:

- How can you benefit in the long run?
- What can you do to prepare yourself in advance, so you’re not taken by surprise?
- What power do you have to decide the terms of your departure?
- Can you be consistent with your own dreams, in the face of a marketplace that is urging you to build a career that doesn’t interest you?
- How do your skills, talents, and drive fit into the larger business community?

### FAQs

*Why is it important to have a strategy in place before I lose my job?*

If you are able to design your strategy in a calm environment, you can coolly select the steps and actions to take later when you are most likely to feel panicked and diminished by the event of discovering your employer no longer wants you.

*If I’m laid off at my company, does that mean my relationship with my employer is over for good?*

No. Many employers who are laying off their workers recognize that it’s very likely that they will want to hire them back again when economic conditions improve. Even if that were not to happen, the business world is very small and you will likely run into your employer down the road at a convention, or even at a different organization. In fact, it’s not unheard of for the laid-off employee to be the one to hire their former superior at a different organization months or years later. For this reason, it’s important never to burn a bridge!

*What should I tell my family?*

Try to remember that there is no shame in losing your job. Hundreds of thousands of excellent employees all over the world face unemployment through no fault of their own. If you aren't completely honest with your family, they won't understand the strain and tension that is suddenly in your home and you will rob them of the opportunity to support you in your time of crisis. Everyone—down to the smallest child—can contribute to the cause of thriving in temporarily reduced circumstances. This could be a golden opportunity to become closer through the teamwork needed to pull through.

## **Making It Happen**

*Try to Be Aware of Lay-off Potential Long Before It Actually Happens*

Employers are often reluctant to announce to the workforce that there is a lay-off planned for fear that everyone will disappear en masse, leaving the organization in chaos. But it's still possible to be aware of trends that might be harbingers of unemployment. Is your local newspaper reporting lower profits out of your company? Is there a merger or acquisition rumored? Is there a sudden spate of "closed-door" meetings where there usually have been none? Has your boss, or boss's boss, suddenly lost organizational power, no longer being invited to those closed-door meetings? Is your own job a vital link to the organization's profitability or is it a "cost center?" Is your overall industry—or local economy—suffering a downturn? The answers to these questions might help you assess how secure your position really is.

*No Matter How Secure You Think Your Job Is, Always Take Time to Be a Recognized, Respected, and Active Member of At Least One Professional Organization or Association*

Have a large and intricate network of contacts that you can always draw from, no matter what your employment circumstances. That network could be your advance warning system, or the conduit for information about other jobs and opportunities in good times and bad. Knowing you have that resource at your disposal will reduce the anxiety and panic, should the worst-case scenario of losing your job actually come true.

*Understand You're Part of a "Value Mesh"*

"Old economy" market equations would place you in a value chain, where you buy from one and sell to another, almost always in your immediate sphere of commerce or expertise. But in the "new economy" environment, you are actually one connection in an entire mesh—or network—of buyers and sellers from a wide variety of spheres and expertise. With a little imagination, what you do and what you know can be translated into a huge number of marketplaces, not just the one you're doing business in currently.

*Don't Sign the Severance Agreement While In a State of Shock*

Most employers will tell you the terrible news and then slide a contract under your nose for you to sign before you go away. Remember, they have had plenty of advance warning to devise a

separation agreement that benefits the organization. You deserve at least 24 hours to let your head stop spinning and enable you to consider it carefully, perhaps even with an attorney.

### *Remember That Many Severance Agreements Are Negotiable*

Perhaps you can convert your job to a contract position. In most cases, after all, the work still has to be done. By offering to do it on an outsourcing basis, you have found a way to generate cashflow for yourself while staying in touch and on good terms with your former employer. Other negotiable details can include the right to continue to use your office space while searching for new employment (the space exists whether you're there or not, and the illusion of being employed adds to your attractiveness to other possible employers); use of company equipment and services, such as the photocopier machine and voice mail; letters of recommendation or introduction from the organization's senior executives; or a larger severance pay package.

### *Take Advantage of Company-sponsored Outplacement Services*

The best outplacement services are highly valuable benefits, largely unavailable to the average individual. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to have free professional help in designing your job search plan of action and to receive state-of-the-art aptitude and skills testing—as well as giving you a place to go to every day, where you will be in a professional office environment with your peers. Outplacement counselors also know the best and most powerful employers in the area, so you are plugged into a pipeline that's not available to individuals unaffiliated with organizations or outplacement services.

### *Keep Your Skills Up to Date*

If your employer is offering free or subsidized skills training, take advantage of the offer. If you have been out of the job market for even as little as a year, it's likely that your technical and professional skills would benefit from a refresher course. Seize every learning opportunity that's placed before you. It will give you both a technical edge and the confidence to start your job search project.

### *Keep Your Spirits Up*

The "pink slip party" is a new phenomenon of the current round of firings and closings. Throw a party for your fellow survivors, and invite local recruiters to enjoy the gathering as well. It's good to know you're not alone and, even if recruiters don't have any opportunities at the moment, they'll be glad to collect your résumé and contact information. The economy goes through cycles, and recruiters will always be glad to have a full file of excellent potential candidates.

### *Forget Those Lists of Promising, "Hot" Careers*

They only ever promise a glut on the market of such careers in two to four years' time. Do what you love and build a career around your passions. There will always be a demand for employees

who love what they do—they're the most innovative, self-starting, and constantly developing individuals.

## **Common Mistakes**

### *You Fall into a Disempowered Despair*

Don't tie your sense of self-worth to your career or job. You are who you are, regardless of where your salary is coming from. If you fall into a trough of low self-esteem, volunteer your professional expertise to a charity. The time spent with others will get you out of your malaise. Most important, you'll experience the real benefits of your gifts and knowledge, as they'll be received with no other payment than gratitude.

### *You Don't Take Care of Yourself Physically*

Without routine and regular exercise, the sofa and the remote control become increasingly enticing. But if you maintain a regular routine and exercise program, your sense of purpose and minute-by-minute priorities will remain clear. The endorphins resulting from your physical exertion will also keep the blues and fear at bay. Eating sensibly and taking proper vitamin supplements will keep your body strong and resistant to the stress that comes with uncertainty.

### *You Let Isolation Overwhelm Your Life*

Make a point of filling your calendar with business meetings every week. Put on presentable street clothes every day and go to a local coffee shop, if that's all that is available, just to be out among people. Meet at least one new person a week. Find a way to help that individual by introducing him or her to someone inside your own value mesh.

## **For More Information**

### *Book:*

Berman, Eileen L. "Dealing Effectively with Job Loss: A Unique Approach to Rebuilding Your Life." Alpharetta, GA: Authority Press, Inc, 1999.

### *Web site:*

Laid Off Central, [www.laidoffcentral.com/](http://www.laidoffcentral.com/)