

Coping with downsizing and job loss

While some people may see a job loss as a challenge which opens up new opportunities, most associate job loss with strong negative emotions. It is natural to have some negative feelings (especially at first) after a job loss.

Common issues associated with a job loss:

- **Loss of professional identity.** Unemployment can often lead to a loss of self-esteem. When a job is lost, part of your sense of self may be lost as well.
- **Loss of a network.** When your social life has been strongly linked to the job, many ongoing “work friendships” are suddenly halted. Old friends and colleagues often don’t call because they feel awkward or don’t know what to say.
- **Emotional unpreparedness.** If you have worked at the same job for a long time, you may feel devastated and unprepared.

Tips to cope with job loss

There are many things that you can do to take control of the situation and maintain spirits including taking care of yourself, reaching out to others, and by re-examining whether this career path is one that makes you happy.

- **Do allow time to grieve.** Loss comes in many forms: loss of income, purposeful activity, self-confidence, work-based social network, daily routine, sense of security, etc. Take time to process your feelings.
- **Do ask for a reference.** If the job loss is due to downsizing or something unrelated to your performance, you should ask for a reference. If you are leaving on unfavorable terms, you can try and get a good or neutral reference.
- **Don’t burn your bridges.** Emotions run high when we lose a job, however, becoming angry or vengeful during your final hours or days is not productive. It is not unusual to lose a position with a company and then have an opportunity to return to work for that same company. Colleagues notice and remember when someone is able to stay positive and constructive during highly stress situations.

- **Don’t badmouth your previous employer to prospective employers.** You will only make yourself look bad. You do not want the interviewer to think you are difficult to work with. Employers know that losing a job, regardless of the reason, is highly distressing and when you maintain a positive attitude, this will be noticed.

Job search tips

After allowing yourself some time to cope and reflect on your job loss, consider these tips as you start your job search.

- **Rebuild your self-esteem.** Make a list of everything you do well and what you like and appreciate about yourself. Talk to former co-workers and managers and ask them to give you a reference.
- **Build your network and avoid isolation.** Get the word out about your job search. Make personal connections with people in your field, set up informational interviews with companies that interest you.
- **Lean on your support system.** Identify the people in your life who know you and ask them to help you through the transition. Think about the ways they can help you. It could be by listening, networking, providing resources for financial assistance, etc.
- **Keep a regular daily routine.** Finding a job is a job in itself. Do job search activities online in the morning, network in the afternoon and make time for self-care activities like exercise.

- **Get clear on what you want.** Take some time to reflect on your strengths and weaknesses and what type of work you enjoy. The better you know yourself, the more likely you'll find a new job that provides you with greater satisfaction.
- **Keep a journal.** Research has shown that laid-off workers who spend 30 minutes a day writing about being unemployed return to work significantly faster than those who don't journal. The exercise has been shown to defuse intense emotions and help people feel better about their situation.
- **Go easy on yourself and family.** Unemployment is a stressful time for the entire family. Don't bear the burden alone. Talk to your family and listen to them too. Build family spirit through positive family activities.
- **Send thank-you notes.** A quick note of thanks following an interview that emphasizes your interest and fit with the job will make you stand out. Remember only 50% of candidates send thank-you notes, but 85% of hiring managers report that post-interview thank-you notes influence their decisions on who to hire.
- **Volunteer.** Research has shown that volunteering offers physical and emotional benefits including decreased stress and improved mood. Find a non-profit aligned to your interests and give back to the community. You will feel happier and healthier and it will increase exposure to networking opportunities.



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