

How to Handle the Emotional Side of Job Loss and Job Search with Resiliency

Losing your job through no fault of your own can wipe you out emotionally. How do you deal with your loss of esteem? With anger? How do you sustain your energy for searching for work? You know that prospective employers are turned off by an applicant who complains about a previous employer, how can you be pleasant, relaxed, and self-confident in an interview? Here are guidelines for skillfully handling the emotional challenge of dealing with job loss and searching for new employment:

1. Write about how you feel. Include all the things you would like to have said to your previous bosses but didn't. Continue expressing your feelings over and over until you feel emptied. Do this once a day for a week. Afterwards do this anytime you have a flashback. Psychologist James Pennebaker had one group of unemployed people write down their feelings about being laid off for twenty minutes, five days in a row. He had a similar group of unemployed people write about their time schedule for their job search for twenty minutes, five days in a row. In the months that followed more of the people who wrote about their emotions found employment. Afterwards the emotions writing group said they wished someone had told them about what to do sooner.

Writing about your feelings is especially important if the way you were terminated was emotionally painful. Recall the details and write about how you feel over and over and over again. Doing this helps you overcome emotional trauma, begin to heal, and stop feeling like a victim wounded for life.

Do pleasant, enjoyable things each day. Do what revitalizes you! Positive emotions expand your problem solving skills and strengthen your resiliency.

2. Resiliency starts with adapting quickly to the new reality. Dwelling on "If only,..." keeps you mired in the past and is discouraging. Choose to have this happen at this time in your life. Why is it good that this happened? What unexpected opportunity has losing your job opened up for you?

3. Form a small support group. Link up with others like yourself. Devote your first meetings to grieving about what you have lost. Take turns talking about the way you were terminated. Have each person answer these questions:

- What did you enjoy about your job?
- What do you miss the most?
- What do you not miss?
- What is one of your best accomplishments? What will you always feel proud about?

Telephone each other each evening to find out how you are doing. As Barbara Sher and Annie Gottlieb point out in *Wishcraft*, people have more courage for each other than they have for themselves.

Hold brainstorming sessions about how to find employment opportunities. Be alert to help each other discover good opportunities.

4. Rebuild your self-esteem. Make a list of everything you like and appreciate about yourself. Include all the things you've done in the past year that you like yourself for doing. A good way to boost your self-esteem and self-confidence is to obtain letters of appreciation from recent co-workers and managers about how much they enjoyed working with you. These may be short paragraphs describing either specific or general contributions you made. Yes, it takes courage to ask people for these endorsements, but you will be pleasantly surprised and touched by people's eagerness to help. You will be moved by their appreciation of strengths and qualities you may not have realized anyone noticed. After obtaining these endorsements, type three or four paragraphs from the letters on a single sheet and attach it to your resume.

Remember: employers in the process of hiring are concerned by the one factor most difficult to predict: What would this person be like to have around on a day to day basis? By providing a page of endorsements, you help prospective employers resolve their dilemma and gain a more complete understanding of you. In addition, you dispel the illusion that unemployed people have something "wrong" with them. These endorsements document the value you had to people you worked with and will also help to remind you of all that you contributed.

5. Write a detailed description of what you do well and practice talking about your reliable strengths. Describe specific projects or assignments you feel proud about. Describe your people skills. Describe what equipment or software you run well. Describe your abilities to your support group or to a friend. In today's world you must overcome false modesty! Telling others about your reliable strengths and skills is not bragging. One executive told me, "I ask job applicants why I should hire them. I figure if they can't sell themselves to me, how can they sell my company to prospective customers?"

6. Discover something of value in your experience. People hit with major, life disrupting experiences will tend to have either a victim/blaming reaction or a coping/learning reaction. Find the gift. Why was it good that this happened? What have you learned from this experience? How has it made you a stronger, better person? Prospective employers are impressed with someone who can admit to being upset and distressed, but have managed to find value in the experience. Practice telling people, "It was rough at first, but I'm glad it happened because...." Find encouragement in resiliency stories.

7. Make finding a job your job. Don't hang around the house as if you are on vacation. Get out and talk with people. Nine out of ten job openings are never advertised in the newspaper. Make appointments to find out what is happening in places where you would like to work.

Be persistent. Research has shown that the one factor above all others that leads to getting hired is the number of potential employers contacted.

Focus on the employer's needs, more than your own. No one except a relative will hire you because you need a job. When you find a position you would like to have, research what the managers need to have happen. Then customize your resume and application to fit exactly with what this employer needs. They must see you as uniquely qualified for the position.

Before your job interview take a few minutes to meditate on your past successes and reliable skills. If you become preoccupied with the fourteen times you've been turned down, you might as well not show up. The attitude "You probably won't want to hire me either" gets results, as does the attitude "You are going to benefit greatly if you hire me." Stay balanced, expect to be hired while being emotionally prepared to be turned down.

8. Be open to unexpected opportunities. A man who had worked as an inventory control specialist for a large electronic firm was in a convenience store one Saturday about noon. Behind him was a tired looking man with an armload of sandwiches and soft drinks.

"Going on a picnic?" he asked the man with the sandwiches.

"No," the man said. He nodded toward the building across the street, "we're doing our annual inventory. We'll be here all week-end working late."

"Don't you have a database program to do all that?" the specialist asked.

"The company has one, but the person who knew how to run it left for another job. We're doing it by hand."

The specialist said he believed he could help, walked across the street, and after a quick demonstration of his skills was hired on the spot.

9. Take creative action. Toward the end of the Depression in the 1930s, Professor Howard Stephenson wrote a book about people who were good survivors. One of his favorite stories was about a red-headed young man who answered a newspaper ad for an office assistant. When the young man showed up at the business he found a long line of job applicants ahead of him. Sizing up the situation, he went to the nearest Western Union office and had the following telegram delivered to the employment interviewer:

"Don't hire anyone until you talk to the red-headed kid at the end of the line." Shortly after the telegram was delivered the interviewer came out of his office with the telegram clutched in his hand. He found the red-headed sender of the message and took him into the office. The interviewer said, "You are exactly the sort of assistant we need here," and hired him.

10. Pay attention to your recent employer's new situation. Four environmental specialists with a state agency had their jobs eliminated even though their work was mandated by the federal government. In a problem solving session, a few of them saw that their work had to be done by someone even if the state had to hire a consulting firm to do it. The solution? They formed a consulting firm and obtained the contract at a higher rate of pay for them all!

Job Loss, Job Search Guidelines Checklist:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Write about what upsets you.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Do what revitalizes you. Enjoy pleasant moments each day.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Choose to have it happen. Avoid "If only..."
<input type="checkbox"/>	Find the unexpected opportunity. What calls to you?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Form a small support group. Encourage, coach, and help each other.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Bolster your self-esteem, make a list.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Add personal testimonials to your resume.
<input type="checkbox"/>	When are you at your best? What is easy to do? What do you do well?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Find value in what you are going through.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Develop empathy for employers. What is an ideal employee like?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Give up false modesty. Practice describing your strengths.

- Be ready for the resiliency question.**
- Read articles and books about highly resilient people.**
- Make finding a job your job. Be persistent.**
- Stay balanced, expect to be hired while being emotionally prepared to be turned down.**
- Be open to unexpected opportunities.**
- Use your imagination, be playful, be bold.**

by Al Siebert, PhD

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Information from: <http://resiliencycenter.com/handle-the-emotional-side-of-job-loss-with-resiliency/>