

Coping with a Layoff

Turning a misfortune into an opportunity!

Today's work climate is one where employees are under the constant stress of layoffs. Everyone knows it will happen; it's just a matter of when and whose name will be on the list.

The stress on the worker is enormous. The thought of losing a job is devastating. It is a blow to one's self esteem and is made even worse when one has a family to consider and to support. Family or no family, the individual is left feeling alone. Shock and disbelief are usually the first emotions experienced followed by anger and then fear of the unknown.

The stress takes its toll on the employer as well. Often, the manager is asked to provide a list of names and s/he is left to this horrible task of deciding which employee stays and which employee leaves. Such a burden takes its toll on the manager and can adversely affect his/her mental health.

In order to successfully go through the pain of job loss, one needs to go through a healthy period of mourning just as one would in the case of a death. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross outlines the stages of dealing

with a loss very clearly in her book *On Death and Dying* (Macmillan Publishing, 1969). It is these same stages that a laid off worker needs to go through in order to emerge from this loss healthy and prepared to tackle what lies ahead.

Briefly, the stages are:

1. Denial and Isolation
2. Anger
3. Bargaining
4. Depression
5. Acceptance



The worker needs emotional support to go through these stages. The worker also needs concrete strategies to cope and to eventually start looking for alternate work. This is where ERGO-Wise has helped many laid off workers successfully deal with their loss and land on their feet.

At ERGO-Wise, the person works with a registered occupational therapist who is also a certified counsellor and a coach. The person has the opportunity to explore feelings, express concerns/fears/worries, and receive the support that is so needed at this time.



Work Information Newsletter is developed by Adeena Wisenthal, registered occupational therapist and owner of ERGO-Wise, a centre in Ottawa that specializes in workplace mental health.

This issue focuses on effective ways of dealing with layoffs in order to emerge from under this heavy weight.

Past newsletters may be found at the download section of www.ergo-wise.com.

Things to Consider

- Layoffs aren't personal, although they often feel like they are.
- Being upset with a layoff is normal, but be careful not to turn upset into depression.
- Don't allow your feelings to paralyze you.
- Network! Network! Network! Don't burn bridges; keep in touch with contacts.



Practical Ideas

- Plan for the job/career you want to have. Don't focus on the job you just lost.
- Plan for your finances while looking for work.
- Commit to job search for the long haul. This is not a quick process.
- Don't beat yourself up.

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But, the help does not stop there. Working at ERGO-Wise, the person has the opportunity to work in a simulated work environment equipped with state of the art computers and software applications. S/he is guided in the job search process which includes resume writing, cover letters, and interview preparation.

The presence of other 'co-workers' helps in the process. The environment is friendly, supportive, and non-threatening. People share with each other as much or as little as they want. This, alone, helps the person along the journey to finding new work.

ERGO-Wise is not a job finding service. It is a 'workplace away from work' where people can go and work on the job of job search.

Whether at ERGO-Wise or not, it is

crucial for the laid off worker to have a routine. It is important to consider job search a full time job and to take it very seriously.

Family members also need to be brought into the process. The laid off worker might not be going to work but s/he is embarking on work by assuming the job search process as a real job (albeit non paid).

It is important to avoid the temptation of staying in bed and wallowing in self-pity. It is important not to view this layoff as a personal hit against you and to regard yourself as an unworthy employee. Most often, you are part of a department shut down and a group of layoffs that are part of a global business initiative.

Use the layoff as an opportunity. We all

dream of alternate work that we would love to do but while we are working in a job, we rarely take the step to pursue our dreams. Now is your opportunity. Take it!

For some, it is different work. For others, it is starting a business. For others, it can be retraining or going back to school.



Once a person has successfully gone through the layoff process, we often hear comments like: "It was the best thing that could have happened to me!" or "There was a silver lining in all of this!"

Your job is to find the silver lining. Remember: When life hands you lemons, be sure to make lemonade.

Tips for laid off workers:

- Have a daily routine.
- Get dressed every day, eat breakfast, and begin your job search.
- Set aside a place that is your place for job search work
- Network!
- Keep a daily log.
- Write detailed notes of where you applied for a job, contact person, telephone number, etc.
- Follow up phone conversations with written emails that summarize conversations and clarify discussions.
- Follow up any interview with a thank you note/ email noting appreciation for time spent with you.
- Do your homework. Find out about the company where you are applying for a job.
- Be prepared for the job interview.
- Have someone review your resume.
- Include family/friends in the process. Do not isolate yourself!



ERGO-Wise specializes in workplace mental health. This includes facilitating timely return to work through customized work hardening programs, assisting employees who are struggling at work, and helping a laid off worker with the job search process.

At ERGO-Wise, we improve functioning by reducing the negative sequelae of a disability/situation. We empower people to achieve success in their personal and work lives.

Contact us for more information about: return-to-work programs, duty to accommodate, counselling, ergonomics, job search, and vocational exploration.

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