

surviving a job termination

You're fired! Learn how to pick up the pieces and move on.

You never dreamed it would happen to you. You thought you were an outstanding fitness professional. You crunched numbers, worked to create great fitness programs and served your clients well. However, your supervisor thought you were doing an inadequate job, or your company was feeling the economic pinch and eliminated your position.

How do you survive a firing, layoff or downsizing and come out the other side with dignity, self-respect and newfound wisdom? How do you pick up the shattered pieces of your psyche and bounce back? You must work through the pain of the situation, take advantage of the present, and plan wisely for your professional future.

Work Through the Pain

Losing your job can be shocking and emotionally devastating. It is often a life-altering event that leads to depression, low self-esteem, anger, frustration, helplessness, humiliation, embarrassment and shame. Many people take years to recover from such a loss because they do not know how to handle what happened and move on with a new sense of purpose. In interviewing a number of human resources personnel, I gleaned several recommendations to help you face the reality of job loss:

Remain Calm. Do not panic. Thousands of other people have lost jobs and survived.

Find Out Why You Were Fired. If the company has planned a termination meeting, attend it and listen as carefully as you can. If no one gives you a reason for termination, request one. Ask probing questions and get the facts.

Know Your Rights. Review your employment agreement or handbook to see what your rights are. Does your company offer a severance package?

Share Your Feelings. Talk with friends and family to work through the pain and anxiety of losing your job. Accept their support, and do not try to handle the situation alone. To heal more quickly, avoid hibernating and wallowing in self-pity for any extended period of time. If you need additional support, consider counseling.

Do Some Soul-Searching. Why were you fired? Did you really perform as well as you could or should have? First, list all the reasons you can think of that made you more expendable than another employee. Second, write down the specific improvements you need to make.

It may take many months to deal thoroughly with the emotions you feel after losing your job. The key to surviving and thriving is to deal actively with the pain, free yourself from it and move on.

Take Advantage of the Present

One of the greatest challenges following a job loss is having the mental ability to take advantage of the time you have in the present to learn, grow and make improvements before you are hired for your next job. Many individuals find themselves so overcome by the emotions of the ordeal that they wallow in their sadness or anger for too long. Eventually you need to pull yourself up by the shoelaces and move forward. Here are some of the ways you can make the most of your newly empty hours:

Create an Updated, One-Page Resumé. Companies are interested only in your last 10 years of employment. Your resumé information should flow well and be organized and consistent for easy reading. A recruiter should not have to hunt for information.

Make Contacts Immediately. You need satisfactory employment as soon as possible. A time gap on a new resumé looks bad to potential employers. Avoid negative comments about your previous employer.

Improve Your Skills. Make a list of ways you need to improve, and then update your skills. How could you have performed better at your previous job? Get excited about learning something new. Communication and conflict resolution are skills everyone can improve. Read books and enroll in courses.

Expand Yourself. Get out of your com-

develop workplace longevity

Use the following suggestions to develop skills that will enhance your job security:

KNOW PEOPLE'S EXPECTATIONS. What does your boss expect of you? How do your superiors expect you to accomplish your job?

BE GRATEFUL. Be thankful that you have a job, and show appreciation for the person or persons who helped you get hired in the first place. People like to be appreciated.

GET ALONG WITH OTHERS. You will always find people you do not really enjoy working with. Find something positive in each person, and focus on that.

COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR BOSS. Talk regularly to your supervisor. Keep abreast of the company's mission and goals and convey that you understand them.

BUILD CONNECTIONS. Socialize appropriately with your coworkers and boss outside of work. Accept invitations to dinners, sporting events and the like.

EMPOWER YOUR COWORKERS. Praise them on their value and contributions to the company or team.

WATCH YOUR MOUTH. If you are unhappy with your job or the company, do not broadcast it. No one likes a complainer. Quit complaining and do something to improve your situation. Do not gossip about coworkers or share private information.

fort zone. Now that you've faced the brutal reality that you are expendable, look closely at the false assumptions you have made. List ways you can take risks and gain new confidence.

Get Organized. As you wait to hear about job interviews, get organized at home and ready for a new career. Thoroughly learn the current job market. Organized people come across as having their act together; they appear confident and ready to face the next challenge.

Plan Wisely for the Future

Once you have gone through the initial pain of losing your job and made the most of your empty days, focus on planning wisely for your next job or career. You are beginning a new chapter in your life. Plan carefully, following these general guidelines:

Research the Internet. Before any job interview, take time to learn about the company you are pursuing. Research the Internet and read the newspapers. Learn the organization's history, mission statement and profitability. Having this knowledge will help you shine in an interview.

Know Termination Policies. When interviewing for a potential job, ask about the termination policies up front. Has the company downsized or laid off employees in the past? How did supervisors handle the situation?

Watch for Other Opportunities. Now that you know you are replaceable, it pays to be aware of what is going on in the company culture and the national workforce at all times.

Stay Current. Update your resumé every 6–12 months, keep your references and contacts fresh, and always have a resumé on hand.

Piecing Yourself Back Together

You will never fully comprehend the loneliness, loss and humiliation of losing a job until you experience it firsthand. Especially when you have worked many years for a company or lost the only job you have ever known, you begin a long process of soul-searching and rediscovering your individual identity. A job loss is an unexpected reminder that “you are not your job.” You are a valuable person with unique needs, desires and dreams. You have a purpose and talents to contribute to the world around you.

Job loss has far-reaching effects. You must look at your budget to create a strategy for survival until you find more work. You must develop patience as you wait for job opportunities to open up. It could easily take several months to find a new position, especially if you are 50 or older.

Networking skills during this period are critical. Do your homework, and contact all the people you know to make them aware you are searching for a job. Focus on improving your health and close relationships. Most important, nourish yourself with the support and love of your friends. We all need each other for encouragement and inspiration.

Survival may be for the fittest, but thriving is accomplished by the smartest—those who face their fears, grow in the present, and plan wisely and thoughtfully for the future.

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Resource

Busse, R.C. 2005. *Fired, Laid-Off or Forced Out: A Complete Guide to Severance, Benefits and Your Rights When You're Starting Over*. Naperville, IL: Sphinx Publishing.