

NOW WHAT?

TIPS FOR LAID OFF EMPLOYEES

For months, you've heard that your own company may have to downsize due to the weak economy. But when your manager calls you into her office and says you've been laid off, you can't believe it's happening to you. These tips can help you bounce back in a tough economic climate.

STAY WELL

- » You may be on an emotional rollercoaster and feel stressed, anxious, depressed or hopeless. An Employee Assistance Program (EAP) can help you cope. Check with your employer to see if you still qualify for EAP benefits.
- » Avoid blaming yourself for the job loss. Remember that you're not alone; more than 2.5 million Americans lost their jobs in 2008 – and at least two million jobs are expected to disappear in 2009, according to the Conference Board Employment Trends Index.
- » Being in between jobs can offer a chance for reflection and reinvention. (Sometimes, we end up climbing a ladder that's against the wrong wall, as Stephen Covey, author of *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, says.) The Riley Guide (<http://www.rileyguide.com/assess.html>) offers a good starting point for self-assessment.
- » Although you may be tempted to cancel your gym membership, working out is more important than ever if you're feeling anxious, stressed or depressed. See if you can get a discount from your gym, borrow exercise CDs from the library, or go on a brisk walk or run with friends.

A major illness can leave you in the red. But purchasing private health insurance can be costly. Consider these alternatives:

- » If you're married or have a partner, see if you can be added to her health insurance plan via special enrollment. You'll need to do it within 30 days of losing eligibility for other coverage, according to the Department of Labor.
- » A costlier option, but one that allows you to keep the same health insurance you had through your employer for up to 18 months, is COBRA, the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1986. Before you leave the company, check with your employer about COBRA coverage.
- » If you have a pre-existing condition and have difficulty getting coverage, see if your state offers high-risk pool insurance.
- » Consider joining a membership group for lower insurance rates.

MIND YOUR MONEY

Revise your budget, avoid big expenses and consider the following financial tips:

- » File for unemployment insurance promptly. To learn more, visit the Career OneStop website at: <http://www.servicelocator.org/OWSLinks.asp>.
- » Short on cash? *Judiciously* take money out of a standard savings account or taxable investment account, such as a stock portfolio, before turning to your credit cards or 401(k).
- » Change your tax withholding. If your spouse works, adjust the withholding on his or her paycheck to reduce the amount of tax withheld. Temporarily reducing 401(k) contributions can also increase take-home pay.

COME OUT AHEAD IN A TOUGH JOB MARKET

Now more than ever, it's important to know how to differentiate yourself in a competitive job market. Here are some first steps to consider:

- » Under certain circumstances, you may be eligible for special re-training programs and other benefits, such as the U.S. Trade Adjustment Assistance Program or WARN (Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification). Goodwill and AARP also offer programs to help jobseekers with training and placement.
- » Join a job search group or start one – and receive support, feedback and job leads.
- » Update your online networking profiles, get in touch with recruiters and go to networking events (such as alumni or professional association mixers).
- » Don't assume you have a done deal until you have a signed contract in hand.

And when times get especially difficult, it may help to take a long-range view and remember: this too shall pass.

SOURCES

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COPING WITH LAYOFFS

A TIP SHEET FOR EMPLOYEES

Few stresses are more traumatic than facing a layoff. Being laid off can be a frightening, emotionally stressful experience. Your well-being might feel threatened; your self-esteem may seem questioned; and your emotional equilibrium can become off balance. The following tips are important ideas to consider:

TAKE ACTION

- » Whether or not you were prepared for the layoff, begin taking action. Allow yourself some time to weather the shock, make a plan and then follow through.
- » Clarify what benefits you have available and for how long, for example, Outplacement services, EAP, medical insurance, severance, unemployment insurance.
- » Have a plan. Structure your time; plan what you are going to do for the day, and follow through. If it is finding a new job, plan time for updating your resume.
- » Gather information by learning about yourself, your ideas, dislikes, work values, priorities, skills and abilities as this time could be a significant period of reevaluation and opportunity for growth.
- » Educate yourself on what community resources are available and network with your professional and trade associations.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

- » Focus on your health by watching what you eat, getting adequate rest and exercise.
- » Avoid using alcohol and drugs to cope with stress and uncertainty.
- » Do not blame yourself. Remember that layoff is not a personal failure. It is a situation caused by circumstances beyond your control.
- » Have a back-up financial plan and handle your health care issues while you have coverage.
- » Do something daily to pursue your goal of getting a new job and develop a routine.
- » Recognize this time as a family crisis and give them actions to assist you.
- » Actively maintain your support system and do not isolate yourself. The best way to cope with stress is to talk with family and friends about what you are going through.
- » Practice active stress management techniques.
- » Stay positive about yourself. Identify at least one practical and useful thing you have done to address the situation

MHN's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) counselors are here to help, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

TELLING FAMILY AND FRIENDS YOU'VE BEEN LAID OFF

Talking about lay offs can be tough for everyone involved. No company wants to have to cut jobs and tell employees they're being laid off. When you're the person who has lost a job, telling family and friends about it can be difficult. But it's a conversation you have to have, especially with your immediate family or partner. This affects them, too, and they need to hear about it from you. Here are some suggestions for getting through what you think might be a painful process.

FIRST, HAVE A CONVERSATION WITH YOURSELF.

How did you feel when you were first told about being laid off? Were you shocked? Was it hard to believe? Did you feel angry or sad? These are common emotions that many people experience following any loss. It is natural and appropriate to want to share your feelings with those who are closest to you as soon as possible. You may be worried about how to break the news to them. Be aware of your reactions and understand that when you tell your spouse and family they are likely to have initial reactions similar to yours.

TELLING YOUR SPOUSE OR PARTNER

As difficult as it may be, you will want to talk openly and honestly about what's happening and what you know about the situation. Your spouse will probably have many of the same questions as you did, such as why you were laid off, whether there's a chance you'll be rehired, what kind of severance package you received and how the lay off affects your medical and life insurance coverage or your retirement plan. He or she may also want to know whether you will receive help from the company in looking for another job. (You probably received a packet from your company that covers this information or advises you where to go to get these questions answered.)

The next question you will be asking each other is, "What do we do now?" By working together to come up with a plan, you will strengthen your family and your relationships with each other. You may need to rework your budget, discuss how you will begin your job search, whether either of you will look for part-time work and, most of all, make time to listen to each other's concerns and support each other through this time of change. You may want to postpone any major decisions until this situation has been resolved.

If there are children in your family, you will also want to agree on how you will tell them.

TALK TO YOUR CHILDREN IN TERMS THEY UNDERSTAND.

Don't try to hide the news from them, but also don't scare them with more than they are able to understand. Refrain

from having "grownup discussions" in front of small children; this might instill unnecessary fear.

While preschoolers may only need to know that mommy or daddy won't be going to work for awhile and will be looking for a new job, a school age child will need more information. You might let an 8- or 9-year-old know that the company you worked for has had to cut back and mommy's or daddy's job was cut. Reassure them that they will be doing many things as usual, such as a spending time with friends and family. At the same time, let them know you'll tell them if changes are necessary. Don't tell children nothing has changed if you know belt-tightening is called for. Be especially careful not to make promises you may not be able to keep. By soliciting their ideas and help, they will know that they are an important part of the family. Even helping in small ways will make them feel good.

MAKE TELLING RELATIVES AND FRIENDS A PART OF YOUR PLAN TO START ANEW.

Breaking the news to relatives and friends is an opportunity to jumpstart your search for a new job. Lay out the circumstances of the layoff briefly and in terms you feel comfortable sharing. Leave out details you want to keep private; don't make up a better-sounding scenario. Simply saying, "I'm leaving my job and looking for new opportunities," just about covers it if that's all you're willing to say. Be specific about the kinds of jobs you'd consider, and let them know that job-hunting suggestions and tips about openings they're aware of will be appreciated. These are people who know you and will be motivated to help.

The information sharing doesn't end once you've told everyone you think should know. Keep the lines of communications open. A spouse or partner who's kept up-to-date can help make plans for finances and other issues. Children whose questions are welcomed and answered feel more secure. Relatives and friends who get responses to suggestions and tips – even the ones that don't work out – are more likely to keep a look out for the job that suits you.

Finally, keep that conversation with yourself going. How are you handling things? What's your outlook – are you optimistic or pessimistic about the future? Are emotional struggles interfering with your ability to meet the challenges you face? If you feel you need help now or may need help in the future, find out what resources are available to you.

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