

Coping with Job Loss

By Lyris Bacchus Steuber, MS, LMFT

Among life-altering events, such as the death of a family member, divorce, and a serious illness, losing your job ranks among the highest in stress-causing situations. Job loss can have a profound effect on your emotional well-being. You may experience symptoms of depression such as isolation, a loss of interest in activities, an increased need for sleep or an increased sense of worthlessness. Your family life may also become affected. Besides the financial pressures to provide for them you may experience increased irritability with loved ones and may find yourself isolating.

During this time it is important to keep the following in mind to help you bounce back

1. **Allow yourself to grieve:** It is normal for you to feel a sense of loss, sadness or even anger. You may even see yourself as a victim of circumstance. Acknowledge your feelings but don't let them paralyze you to not act.
2. **Assess your values, strengths, weaknesses and goals:** It is important to take a realistic look at yourself and ask yourself where do you want to be 6 months, 1 year, and 5 years from now. It may be the perfect time to take some classes to update your skills.
3. **Utilize your support system:** Be sure to process your emotions with your family, a close friend or even a trained counselor. Seek their ideas and support. Remember that your family may be experiencing the same stress as you so learn how to cope with frustration. Develop a "we're all in this together" attitude.
4. **Take proper steps to stabilize your financial situation:** This may mean calling your creditors and asking for a more reasonable payments plan. You should also try to cut back on un-necessary spending. Items like cable, the latest cell phone or a new designer purse may have to wait. Develop a budget worksheet and stick to it.
5. **Inform EVERYONE you know of your situation:** Ask for assistance, advice, referrals, and support. You never know who is amongst their contacts and who might be useful to you. Network, network, network! Don't overlook opportunities to do so through social clubs, churches, organizations or even interactions at the supermarket. Always have business cards ready to give out to people with your contact information on it.
6. **Devise a job search plan and work it:** Just as you would for a normal job, devote close to 40 hours per week to your job search. Maintain regular work hours so you won't be tempted to sleep the day away. Use the time you have to network, search for jobs on the internet, make phone calls, send faxes, re-work your resume, or create promotional materials. Send thank you cards and thank you e-mails to people you interview with.
7. **Develop healthy coping skills:** It is important during this time to maintain a healthy life style. You may not be able to afford a gym membership but walking, running and lifting weights can be done at home or close to home. It is important to drink lots of water, eat healthy and get an adequate amount of sleep. This will help offset any depressive symptoms that might want to creep in and will also keep you healthy.
8. **Keep a positive attitude:** It is easy to get discouraged when your phone calls are not returned or when you've gone on 10 different interviews without any job offers. Staying optimistic will help to keep you motivated. Have faith that God knows your hurts and needs and he will provide for you.

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