

Managing the Stress of Layoff and Unemployment

When a person's job ends involuntarily due to budget cuts, reduction in force, reorganization, etc, it is normal to feel a sense of loss. Some employees indicate that this is much like going through the grieving process. It is not uncommon to feel like you have lost many things including your livelihood, colleagues, security and status which can impact one's self-esteem. Although some individuals may immediately begin the job search process, others need time to heal in order to effectively move forward.

Emotional Reactions during a Job Change

It is normal for individuals to experience a range of emotional reactions over a period of time. The six listed below may not occur within this particular order and not all six may be experienced by everyone. In addition, a person may jump back and forth between emotions. Each individual will have his/her own response to the situation. Be patient with yourself and the process. Keep in mind that family members may also experience these same emotions and support may be needed to help them cope during this period.

Co-workers may often experience a range of emotions including survivor's guilt. In some cases they may not know how to communicate with someone whose job has been eliminated, sometimes seeming distant or unsupportive.

<p>1. Shock and Denial</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feelings of numbness and disbelief • Refusal to accept the news • Minimizing the impact 	<p>This is a natural reaction that prevents a person from feeling overwhelmed. When such news is completely unexpected it is normal to have difficulty listening, absorbing the information given, or in focusing on available options. Some may feel a variety of emotions simultaneously, while others may lack feelings altogether due to a delayed reaction. When first receiving the bad news, consider doing the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow yourself time to absorb the impact of the news. • Do not make hasty decisions. • Let your supervisor know if you cannot focus on what happens next. Ask to meet with him/her again once you have had time to take in the information. • Find emotional support from your friends, family or others. • Practice stress relievers, eat healthy and follow a routine. Take care of your health. • Try not to allow yourself to remain in this stage too long. It's important to start planning for the next job as quickly as possible.
<p>2. Emotional Release</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to vent feelings of anger, sadness, frustration, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge and deal with feelings of anger, sadness, frustration, blame, etc. • Resolving these issues will help you to be able to listen to options and ideas. • Share your feelings with trusted family and friends. • Professionals indicate that this is a time when exercise and social networking can help to release pent-up emotions.

<p>3. Panic and Anxiety</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trouble thinking clearly and planning effectively • Try to do everything at once and do nothing effectively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deal with your fears directly so you can find options to meet your needs • Reassess who you are and what you want. Begin with making goals. • Meet with your supervisor and/or HR/EO staff to learn about options and available services. • Take things one step at a time. Handling all of the details at once may seem overwhelming. Make a list of your needs and options. This is a good time to start thinking of “what if” options in case there is a lapse in time before finding the next job.
<p>4. Anger and Blame</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling angry at colleagues or others • Blame may be used to try to explain how something happened, but it rarely resolves the issue. 	<p>Anger can be healthy reaction because it indicates to the employee that he/she values him/herself. However, if anger or blame is dwelt upon it has ill effects. In order to move forward in a positive direction focus on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge and deal with anger. Talk to family members, friends or a professional to dispel negative feelings. • Exercise or use other stress reducing techniques. • Focus on what options you can pursue rather than dwelling on anger and blame. • Try writing in a journal to express emotions and feelings.
<p>5. Depression, Sadness and Physical Distress</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feelings of loss or helplessness • Hopelessness or withdraw • Doubt in abilities • Physical signs of stress (e.g. sleeplessness, loss of appetite, body pain, or illness) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk to family, friends and trusted colleagues about how you are feeling. • Exercise, stay socially active, and determine how to reduce stress levels. • Avoid negative people and ways of thinking. • Resist the temptation to view yourself as a victim. Take steps to plan your own future. • Recognize that this loss is real and painful. • Utilize resources and/or professional assistance if the depression lingers, if it is too much to handle, or if you exhibit clinical signs of depression.
<p>6. Acceptance and Exploration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore new opportunities for a new work life • Clarify goals and feel in control to take action on them • Be productive on the job 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a positive outlook. The situation may be an opportunity to change something you had been thinking of changing (career track, location, etc.). • Assess your personal values and goals. Explore opportunities. Think of the job loss as a temporary setback. • Explore your passion, take time to understand yourself, seek new training, or return to school. You may consider taking a survival job while pursuing your dreams. • Take advantage of resources available to you within the University and the community. • Meet with a HR/EO recruitment coordinator and network with colleagues to explore all job possibilities.

Additional Information:

- http://www.hreo.ku.edu/policies_procedures/termination/uss_layoff
- http://www.hreo.ku.edu/policies_procedures/termination/ups_non_reappointment