

## Layoffs: Taking the Right Emotional Action

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The words that many people are afraid to hear today are, “You are laid off”. When receiving the lay off news, people can go through a rapid cycle of emotions: Surprise, Anger, Rejection and Acceptance. In the surprise stage (me, why me, what did I do wrong) bargaining may begin: I will take a cut in pay if I can stay. The Anger emotions may manifest themselves in unrealistic negative statements such as “I always hated this company” or “George and Mary, who did not get laid off, never worked as hard as me.” In Rejection, “this was an awful place to work, I’m glad I’m out of here” typifies the emotion. A person who demonstrates Acceptance looks at the layoff as an opportunity to find a better job with new challenges and new people. However, for people who are laid off, it is a natural first reaction to focus on self and blame themselves or the company for everything. Thinking such unhelpful thoughts as “This should not have happened at all,” or “Everything the organization did was wrong” needs to run its course. Continuing to focus only on the negative can be destructive and, in point of fact, impede finding a new position. Once the thoughts that support anger and company rejection dissipate, being laid off can then be viewed as a new transition period of positive thinking, as a change in employment status, as a time to move on.

There is actually much that can be done to help speed their time to resilience or recovery. To arrive at this point, the individuals must create a new mental process by thinking differently about the event, by telling themselves that even though they are experiencing and feeling such negative thoughts, they also realize that they still have a great deal of talent, they have confidence within themselves to be successful and will move on to a new position. The person needs to be aware of emotions, but shouldn’t excessively indulge in those emotions. They need to look at the layoff as a learning process to help prepare they better for the next position. The emotions of anger and rejection at this point are replaced by a new healthier emotion of acceptance, which is needed to move on.

Once the person reaches the acceptance stage, the commitment to find another job is the positive response to this negative situation of being laid off.

A lay off can be viewed as a great opportunity to advance disguised as a painful and devastating period. The commitment is to look at the situation in a positive light and ask what has been learned through this work and layoff experience. It involves having the confidence within self to write a new resume, network effectively, present positively in an interview, and accept another position. Thinking is refocused to opportunities from past positions that can be used to best benefit in new positions. What training was received and certifications attained in prior positions? What opportunities were and are available through networking? All of these thoughts help to correct and balance the emotional relationship within the individual. People in such situations must learn to accept where they are. Acceptance doesn't mean agreeing with the way people ran the organization, or agreeing with the involuntary termination. It means to understand emotional reactions, be ready to begin a new position with self-development thoughts, and then move on in a positive and challenging new opportunity.

Here are actions that can be taken to begin the resilience process (the comeback).

1. Buy a notebook and begin keeping a journal outlining all the actions that you will take. Action topics to keep in a journal could be a list of networking organizations, and identification of key people to network. Write dates, places and people in the journal.
2. In your journal, outline your emotions, how you are feeling, the situation that triggered the emotions (daily), and best worst-case outcomes.
3. Outline professional skills and knowledge, personal skills and abilities (presentation and power points abilities).
4. Locate the appropriate professional organizations in which to network. Look, for example, at the Chamber of Commerce, the Lions or Rotary Clubs. Go to professional organization lunches at places such as engineer clubs, High Tech Council, or Human Resource Management organizations.

5. Become more active: don't fall into disengagement during this emotionally chaotic time of being laid off. To keep active is most important at this juncture. Look at the newspapers or Business Times and identify various ways to professionally network and put this in the journal.
6. Challenge yourself to maintain a positive attitude about the present situation *and* the future. Finding a job is a job in itself. It is vital to create a positive attitude about yourself, the future, your family, and the workplace, and to maintain confidence within to find a new position. To begin the actual job search process, write in the journal all the talents that you have demonstrated in past positions. Many people do not realize that their job title, for example, engineer, administrator or salesperson, does not solely nor adequately define their skills. You should look at all the skills that have actually demonstrated. Some of the skills could include putting presentations together, creating PowerPoint, holding meetings, leading meetings, facilitating, asking questions, advising, coaching, mentoring, phone skills, networking skills, the ability to build trust, and systematically asking the right questions. Those are all skills that stay with people regardless of a position, if they have confidence in themselves to effectively verbalize and utilize those skills.
7. Simulate an interview practice to say things such as, "What I have learned in my last job was...." or "I am looking for a position that will challenge me."

There is a lot you can do to regain confidence and to carry yourself in a more positive light. Even though this is an extremely difficult period, the best way to move beyond is to remain calm, positive and confident, and accept the job of finding a job.