



Surviving a Layoff: Moving Forward With Your Life

Understanding Change

There are two types of changes: voluntary and involuntary. Voluntary changes are the changes you choose to make and are prepared for, such as accepting a promotion, taking early retirement, or starting your own business. Typical reactions to this type of change include excitement, relief, and even anxiety.

Involuntary changes are ones that happen and are beyond your control. These can be a change in health, the end of a relationship, or a change in your work situation, such as being laid off. Initially, most people react to involuntary changes with anger, sadness, or fear.

As a survivor of a layoff, you probably experience change both voluntarily and involuntarily. For example, you may voluntarily choose to take on an increased workload or get additional training, but you may be doing this to avoid losing your job and feel you have no choice in the matter.

Your Departed Colleagues: The Grieving Process

When there are layoffs in a company, it is normal to grieve for those who no longer work there, no matter what your relationship was with your former colleagues. You feel a sense of sadness, and you feel guilty that you survived it.

In 1969 the psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross introduced what became known as the *five stages of grief*. They are

1. Denial
2. Anger
3. Bargaining
4. Depression
5. Acceptance

However, she also acknowledged that there is not a typical response to loss and many people will experience grief differently.

There is no timetable for getting over the effects of a workplace reorganization. Survivors will experience this process differently. Some find that within a few weeks or months the period

between waves of distress lengthens and they are able to feel peace and renewed hope, and gradually start to enjoy both work and life.

Face your fears.

Fear is a fact of life. Whether you call it worry, anxiety, concern, or nervousness, everyone has fears that affect them at least some of the time. Fear is one of the most common experiences for those who remain after a reorganization or downsizing.

1. Name your greatest fear.

What scares you most about the situation you are going through? Write it down. Say it out loud. This way it is out in the open, and you know exactly what you are dealing with. Often, fear loses some of its hold over you once it has been identified.

2. Ask yourself "what if?"

Imagine what could happen if your fear became true. How would you feel if your fear really happened? Think of things you could do if this fear were realized. How would you handle it? Planning how to deal with something in advance reduces the fear of the unknown and increases your ability to deal with it.

3. Don't waste time worrying.

What if your fear didn't come true after all? Research has shown that 90% of what people worry about never happens.

4. Don't fear the unknown.

Often fear comes from not knowing what to expect. Lessen your fear by getting information. Do this by talking to people, reading books and reputable newspapers, and surfing the Web. Turn your "unknowns" into "knowns."

5. Believe in yourself.

People are often their own worst critics. Focus on maintaining a positive attitude, and remind yourself of your strengths. Change your "I can'ts" into "I cans."

Reduce your stress.

It's a fact: Life can be stressful. The aftermath of layoffs in a company is a particularly stressful time for all employees. Learning to cope with this stress is an important step to ensuring a healthy, balanced life and improving your ability to manage change.

Stress the good points.

A little stress is a good thing: It drives you; it challenges you. It's your body's normal flight-or-fight reaction to danger. It's good to know where it comes from so that you can work at managing it. However, too much stress is not healthy. It can cause increased blood pressure, stress headaches, and many other physical and mental reactions. Don't ignore these symptoms!

Signals of excessive stress can be that you

- are less talkative
- have less energy
- have lower productivity
- are late for work or meetings
- have trouble sleeping
- show a loss of appetite
- have decreased wants

Tips for Reducing Stress

Different people manage stress in different ways. There is no one right way to reduce stress. Choose what works for you:

1. **Take things one at a time and one day at a time.** There's a limit to how much you can do. Set priorities. When you have too many tasks and responsibilities, concentrate on the one thing you need to do now, and put the others aside until later.
2. **Listen to your feelings.** Listen to yourself. Reframe your thoughts in a positive light. For example, "I will be as ready as I can be" as opposed to "I will never be ready in time."
3. **Breathe deeply.** This is easy and takes only a few minutes a day. Feel the immediate calm when you consciously breathe in deeply through your nose from deep down in your diaphragm. Place your hand gently on your stomach to feel it expand a little as you breathe in. Hold for a few moments, and then slowly let it go—all of it—through your mouth.
4. **Relax in a calm setting.** Sit outside and enjoy nature. If you can't be in a natural area or park, head to a balcony, deck, garden, or walking trail. Visualize a peaceful setting that works for you.
5. **Listen to music.** Pick music that soothes you. As you listen, mentally focus on one body part at a time, starting with your head and gradually moving to your toes. Slowly tell each to relax. Feel the tensions slip away.
6. **Move your body.** Go for a walk during your lunch break. Run, cycle, swim, dance, lift weights, or play a sport. Feel energy, vitality, and zest return.
7. **Laugh it off.** Laughing releases tensions and reverses the physical effects of stress on your body. Share a joke with a friend or colleague!
8. **Be creative.** Enjoy something that interests you that will keep your hands busy and absorb your attention for a while. Garden, paint ceramics, create a scrapbook, draw, doodle, or work with wood and other natural materials.
9. **Live a balanced life.** You've heard the one about all work and no play. Make time for family, friends, and leisure activities in your life.
10. **Talk to someone.** Talk about your hopes and fears to someone with whom you feel comfortable. Or call your employee assistance program (EAP).

Stay positive.

A positive attitude can make the difference between success and failure. Attitudes are based on what you've learned and experienced, and affect the way you think, act, and feel. Staying positive can help you stay focused as you work through changes in your life.

Your attitude says a lot about you. Employers recognize the importance of a positive attitude. A positive attitude in the workplace has a positive effect on customers and colleagues. Put your positive attitude to work for you.

Here are a few tips to staying positive all day long:

- Start your day by looking for something good that is happening.
- Choose your attitude for the day. Focus on the good.
- Give someone an unexpected compliment.
- Ignore the bad drivers on the road.
- Really listen to what someone is saying, and focus on understanding him or her.
- Help someone.
- Explore your spiritual life.
- Before going to sleep, review your day and note the small positive things that happened.

Keep it simple.

Simplifying the way you live is one way to regain control over your life during times of workplace reorganization. Take into account what you need to live, what you want, and what you can do without.

Plan ahead:

- Save and invest for the future.
- Maintain a good credit rating, and keep debt to a minimum.
- Prepare and use a budget.
- Establish an emergency fund.

Spend time with people who are important to you:

- Family, friends, and neighbors are part of your support network.
- Often the simplest pleasures are the most rewarding.
- Don't be afraid to ask others for help.

Reevaluate your priorities and values:

- Focus on the things that bring you meaning.
- Think about your personal values and work obligations.
- Look at your work-life balance.

Manage your debts:

- Speak to a debt-management specialist.
- Consolidate your loans.
- Contact creditors about managing payments.

Spend time doing the things that are important to you:

- Explore your hobbies and passions.
- Exercise your mind, body and spirit.

Spend less money:

- Grow your own vegetables.
- Shop for generic-brand products, and buy in bulk.
- Use the library and other community services.
- Take public transit, carpool, walk, or ride a bike.

Listen to yourself:

- Take control of your life.
- Steer yourself toward doing what you enjoy.
- Turn your "I can'ts" into "I cans."

Earn extra money:

- Have a yard sale or sell some of your unwanted possessions through Internet auction sites. This will also give you more control over the material things in your life.
- Rent out a room in your home.
- Do temporary, part-time, or seasonal work.
- Start a low-cost, home-based business.

Remind yourself that your needs are important:

- Look after yourself so that you will be able to look after others.
- Do a little something for yourself every day.

Get help:

- Ask family and friends for their support.
- Call your EAP – [Encompass 1-800-788-8630](tel:1-800-788-8630)