



# My *LifeSolutions*' Survival Tool Kit



Losing your job is one of life's most stressful events. The following is an article from your EAP that addresses some of the emotional reactions you might expect to experience and some ways of coping with common stressors during this difficult time:

## Why Me?

It's a normal reaction to ask "Why me?" when faced with losing a job. Psychologists have found that people often deal with loss better if they know what to expect during the grieving process. Usually, grief is experienced in the following stages:

- ◆ **Shock** - You're not fully aware of what has happened.
- ◆ **Denial** - You cannot believe that the loss is true.
- ◆ **Anger** - You wonder, "Why me, why not someone else?"
- ◆ **Bargaining** - You attempt to negotiate even though that option is no longer open, perhaps making such promises as, "I'll be the best employee ever in exchange for keeping my job."
- ◆ **Depression** - You can no longer deny the reality of the loss.
- ◆ **Acceptance** - You reach this point when you have had sufficient time to work through the previously described states. During this stage you come to terms with the loss and get the energy and desire to move beyond it.

While you may go through the stages of grief outlined above, they may not arise in the order mentioned. You may experience strong negative emotions during this transition.

Brian Jud, in his book, *Coping With Unemployment*, suggests that one of the best ways to move to a positive track is to look at what is good in your life now:

- ◆ Family support
- ◆ Experience in getting a job
- ◆ Self-confidence
- ◆ Friends who offer support
- ◆ Good health
- ◆ Years of experience in chosen industry

According to Mr. Jud, visualizing the positive elements of your current situation causes a reduction in the pressure you feel.

### Coping With Stress

It is important to be aware of the risk of stress overload. Stress is linked to the breakdown of the immune system, which makes people more prone to disease. If you allow stress to control your life, you may end up with chronic or persistent illness. To fend off damage to your health due to stress, you must learn to recognize the bodily symptoms of stress, and your bodily responses to stressors. A stressor is any situation that causes unnecessary mental or physical strain or tension. Try to focus on the fact that your situation is temporary, and that you can handle pressure. Here are just a few emotional and physical signs of stress overload.

#### Emotional Signs

- ◆ Anxiety or depression
- ◆ Overeating or loss of appetite
- ◆ Sleep disturbance
- ◆ Impatience/Irritation
- ◆ Substance abuse (alcohol, drugs, caffeine, nicotine)

#### Physical Signs

- ◆ Head, neck, backaches
- ◆ Indigestion
- ◆ Ulcers
- ◆ Nausea
- ◆ A lack of desire (e.g., sexual, other)
- ◆ High blood pressure
- ◆ Nervousness
- ◆ Breathing difficulties



Some people do not realize that they are suffering from stress, especially if they use alcohol or other drugs in the mistaken belief that this is a way to escape from their problems.

### **Family Stress**

As a result of losing your job, you may experience strained relations with your family. For them, your unemployment means a loss of income and the fear of an uncertain future.

Unemployment is a stressful time for the entire family. Here are ways to help you through tough times.

Be open with your family about anxiety and other feelings. Allow your family to work as a group in support of one another.

Listen to the concerns and suggestions of members of your family, and consider the merit of each idea offered.

Join a community support group. Groups for the unemployed provide a place to let off steam and share frustration.

### **Helping Children Cope**

Children may assume the worst if left to themselves to imagine the reason for your job loss. With more complete information about what happened and how it will affect the family, they will understand the situation better. However, in sharing your feelings and plans with them, try not to burden them with too many emotional and financial details. Here are some ways you can interact with your children.

Open a dialogue with your children. Keep them up-to-date on your activity, especially reports on the success you are experiencing.

Make sure your children know it's not anybody's fault. They may think that you did something wrong; or, they may feel somehow responsible or financially burdensome. Regardless of their age, children need reassurance in these matters.

Children need to feel they are helping. Taking a cut in allowance, deferring expensive purchases, or getting an after-school job can make them feel as if they are part of your financial management strategy.

### **The Road to a Better You**

Once you're aware of the warning signs of stress, it's time to take the steps necessary to avoid "stressing out." Here are some coping mechanisms that may help:

- ◆ Identify and balance priorities--handle your most pressing needs or changes first.
- ◆ Get feedback and support from others. Avoid isolation. Positive input from others can help you maintain a constructive attitude about yourself and your future.
- ◆ Follow a nutritious diet and a program of regular exercise. Eating properly will help you sustain a high level of self-esteem and maintain the positive attitude you need during your job search. Include some form of exercise in your daily activities. It provides a positive outlet for tension.
- ◆ Learn how to quiet your mind. Sit comfortably in a firm chair, close your eyes, relax, take in a deep breath, and breathe out slowly while imagining all tension going out with your breath. This technique will help calm and refresh you.

**Source:** New York State Department of Labor; **Adapted From:** Workplace Options ([www.workplaceoptions.com](http://www.workplaceoptions.com))



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# Top 10 Things to Do If You're Laid Off

Being downsized, dismissed, let go, or laid off is never easy. No matter how much information you're privy to regarding your company or industry, it's always a shock when you're the casualty.

Here are 10 things to do should this happen to you.

## 1. Regroup.

Experience the shock, hurt, and anger that you're experiencing, but don't get stuck in the feelings. Instead, focus on the future and what it is you most want and need.

## 2. Mobilize.

Mobilize your resources. List every idea you have about what you think you'll need to do. Get the ideas out of your brain and onto paper. This will help you with brainstorming, with strategizing, and with mobilizing your resources. Immediate action is required; mobilization is the step preceding action.

## 3. Think about people.

List all the people you know. Make a plan about how you'll approach them and for what purpose. How will you explain your situation to people, and what is it that you'll be asking for? Get clear about this last point so your communication with them is productive.

## 4. Think about functions and transferable skills.

Think about the skills and talents you've tapped into in previous jobs. Creatively brainstorm what jobs would easily incorporate these transferable skills. Educators and social workers have successfully transferred their communication skills into corporate training positions, and financial planners have successfully entered other industries as analysts or educators. Successful salespeople frequently "job-hop" industries—their communication skills transcend the product or industry.

## 5. Presentation matters.

Immediately update and upgrade your resume. Have your resume clearly represent your personal best. Make sure that the reader has no doubt about how well you'd perform—have your resume express the best of who you are! This means that impeccability matters. Present yourself professionally and in a style that both flatters and communicates who you are. Give people a reason to hire you. If you don't effectively represent or promote yourself, why should a potential employer think that you'd effectively represent or promote their product?

## 6. Maximize resource utilization.

Don't dismiss newspaper ads because you've heard that most people don't get jobs through the newspaper. Think creatively about what resources are available to you and utilize them. Besides networking and the newspaper classifieds, there are professional organizations, alumni services, and private or public employment offices. Look around your community for other available resources.



## 7. Focus on your strengths.

You're concerned about your future and worried about your income. While you might feel powerless and fearful or anxious about your lack of control, make a commitment to live from your strengths and not from fear. Identify your strengths and make a conscious decision to live from them—observe when you're not. The future will unfold in unforeseen ways when you apply and integrate this concept into your life. Work to maintain your self-confidence while being open to others' contributions. List on a piece of paper the qualities that make you unique and special—list your strengths, talents, and skills. Look at the list daily and add to it when new insights about your strengths emerge. If you don't believe in yourself, no one else will. Focus on your strengths!

## 8. Create a personal board of directors.

Consider creating your very own personal board of advisors. Apply Tom Peters' concept, "the brand called You," (Peters, 1997) to your life—run your life as you would a business. Create a personal board of advisors who will contribute to your success. Invite people you respect and who have complementary perspectives, approaches, and skills. Remember, you learn more from those who are different than from those who are similar. Differences of opinion create a more solid product. When others challenge you, know that they're actually helping to expand your vision. Let others contribute to you. Utilizing your very own personal board of directors will help you get beyond your blind spots.

## 9. Invest in yourself.

Investing time and resources into your personal and professional development is well worth the effort—regardless of your employment status. Structure personal and professional development into your schedule on an ongoing basis. Consider it a necessary ingredient for success. The benefits will far exceed the investment.

## 10. Visualize the future.

Don't let logistics or the fear that your dream is crazy or impossible stop you from visioning the future! There's always learning in the listening—so listen to your dreams. Identify the essence of what most excites you. Creatively brainstorm how you can live from that space more frequently; the more you do this, the more powerfully you'll generate the future you now only dream about.

The layoff may be a blessing in disguise. What is the universe trying to tell you? Is this a wake-up call of some kind? You might unknowingly be on a path of personal discovery—let the layoff be the catalyst for self-discovery and powerful actions! Perhaps it is time to move on to something more challenging and exciting.

Be open and listen. There may be a lesson and an opportunity in this for you.

### Reference

Peters, T. (1997, August). The brand called you. [Electronic version]. *Fast Company*, Issue 10.

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Source: Gordon, J. (2006). *Top 10 things to do if you're laid off*. Retrieved November 16, 2007, from <http://www.qualitycoaching.com>



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# Job Search Basics

## Self-Assessment

This is a fundamental step that is often overlooked, but perhaps the most critical step in achieving your career goal. Take the time to evaluate your skills, your interests, and your dreams. What have you done in relationship to what you want to do? What steps do you need to take to reach your ultimate career goal?

## Research

Once you have defined your skills, work values, educational background, and career interests, it will be time to start researching. Find out as much as you can about the field you've chosen. Utilize every possible resource: local libraries, your alma mater career resource center, community career resource centers, etc.

Gather as much information as possible about trends in the field, which organizations have employees in the field, where the organizations are located, what the salary range is, and what the various titles given to jobs in the field are. Be thorough in your research and maintain files or a notebook to stay organized.

## The Resume

Some people in the job search industry say that a resume gets only 11 seconds of attention from potential employers. That's not a lot of time to let them know what you've done. Keeping this in mind, keep the resume clear, concise, and looking sharp. Remember to use proactive verbs such as *managed, implemented, developed, researched, wrote, designed, created*, etc.

Don't forget the importance of a well-designed resume. The way it looks is as important as what it says. This is an advertisement of you. Present yourself on paper as best you can in 11 seconds.

## Networking

The term *networking* has become a cliché in the job search, but the term is being widely used for a reason—it works. In today's market, it is next to impossible to get a job without knowing somebody who knows somebody. Let it be known that you are on a job search. Ask any and all of your friends and acquaintances to keep you informed of possible job vacancies in their organizations or in organizations with which they may have contacts. One of the most successful ways to network is through informational interviewing.

## Informational Interviewing

How familiar are you with your career field today? Setting up informational interviews is one of the best ways to learn more about the career field of your choice, as well as doubling as a networking option. Ask friends, family, and colleagues if they know anybody in your career field who might be interested in taking 15 minutes of their time to share their expertise about the field.

After setting up the informational interview, prepare by writing down thoughtful questions about the interviewer's responsibilities and best advice for you, and have copies of your resume on hand.

The day of the interview, dress and present yourself professionally; make certain you don't take more time than what was originally agreed upon; and be sure to thank your interviewers, give them a copy of your resume, and ask them if they know anybody else in the field who may also be interested in speaking with you. Although you shouldn't approach an informational interview with the idea that it will offer more contacts and job leads, oftentimes this is the case. Lastly, don't forget those thoughtful thank you letters!



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## The Interview

Here it is: the day towards which you've so diligently worked. You've slaved over books in the career resource center, you've bought a new interviewing suit or dress, you've mapped out a career plan, you have a notebook bursting open with contacts in your field, and your dynamic resume has achieved for you an interview with the organization of your dreams. However, the day of the interview you wake up feeling queasy. Are you getting sick? Or is it maybe just jitters from anticipation?

Interviews can leave you feeling anxious and unsure of yourself. Try your best to approach them with as much confidence as possible. The informational interview process has given you some practice in this process. Prepare yourself further by practicing your interviewing techniques with friends, in front of a mirror, or even use a video machine or tape recording device if you're fortunate enough to have one at your disposal.

Peace Corps. (n.d.). *Returned volunteers—Career resources: Job search basics*. Retrieved February 23, 2009, from <http://www.peacecorps.gov>

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**Resources found on *LifeSolutions' WorkLife* Website**  
**[www.lifesolutionsforyou.com](http://www.lifesolutionsforyou.com)**  
**(Company code: acshic)**

**Categories:**

- ◆ Age and Employment
- ◆ Assessing Your Skills
- ◆ Changing Careers
- ◆ Coping with Job Loss
- ◆ Cover Letters and Resumes
- ◆ Managing Change
- ◆ Networking and Interviews
- ◆ Preparing for Retirement
- ◆ Relocating for Work
- ◆ Understanding FMLA

**Skill Builders:**

- ◆ Changing Careers
  - Moving from Trainer to Performance Consultant
- ◆ Coping With Job Loss
  - Interviewing Skills for Job Candidates
  - Managing Stress
- ◆ Managing Change
  - Managing Change
- ◆ Networking and Interviews
  - Basics of Effective Communication
  - Behavior-Based Interviewing Skills for Job Candidates
  - Business Etiquette and Professionalism
  - Interviewing Skills for Job Candidates

**Career Transition:**

- ◆ Interview Do's and Don'ts: Part 1

**Assessment:**

- ◆ Assessing Your Skills
  - Career Motivation Assessment
  - Goal Setting Assessment
  - Self-Esteem Test
- ◆ Changing Careers
  - Goal Setting Assessment

**Resources:**

- ◆ Assessing Your Skills
  - Job Find and Career Information From the Department of Labor
- ◆ Coping With Job Loss
  - Job Find and Career Information From the Department of Labor
- ◆ Networking and Interviews
  - National Association for Female Executives
- ◆ Preparing for Retirement
  - Women's Institute for a Secure retirement (WISER)
- ◆ Relocating for Work
  - Address Change With the Internal Revenue Service
  - Address Change With the Social Security Administration
  - Address Change With the U.S. Postal Service





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### Coaching/Counseling In-Person and by Telephone

Up to 6 sessions are available for:

- ◆ Stress and everyday life issues
- ◆ Family/relationship concerns
- ◆ Work/career challenges
- ◆ Healthy lifestyle changes
- ◆ Managing anxiety, depression, and alcohol/drug issues

### Referrals to Community Resources

### 24/7 Phone Support

### WorkLife Services

Personalized referrals for:

- ◆ Child care, adoption
- ◆ Elder care
- ◆ Daily living
- ◆ Legal matters
- ◆ Financial counselling
- ◆ Education resources

*(Also, home improvement, travel, recreation, and more)*

## Online resources:

Personalized referrals for:

- ◆ Relocation Center
- ◆ Articles and tips
- ◆ Ready documents
- ◆ Live Connect
- ◆ Financial calculators
- ◆ Self-search locators
- ◆ Skill builders
- ◆ Webinars

*(Instant messaging with WorkLife specialist)*

## Access LifeSolutions

All LifeSolutions services are private and confidential.

Please call:  
**1.800.647.3327**

## Online Access

Visit [www.lifesolutionsforyou.com](http://www.lifesolutionsforyou.com) for more information and resources. To enter our WorkLife portal, click on the WorkLife Log In at the top of the page and enter your **company code: acshic**

**LifeSolutions is available at no cost to you and your household members.**



Services provided by LifeSolutions, formerly EAP Solutions, part of University of Pittsburgh Medical Center

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ACSHIC SW FY C2010.0221-12 (FY) 8/17/10 XM XK

