



Working

Letting go of the loss

Even a layoff can have a silver lining, experts say

By Jacqueline Fitzgerald
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With layoff announcements on the rise, you might find yourself with a case of job-loss jitters. But losing a job does not necessarily spell disaster, according to two psychologists who specialize in workplace issues. And, they say, women often handle the bad news a little better than men do.

"Losing a job doesn't mean what it used to," says Carole D. Stovall, a Washington, D.C.-based psychologist and executive coach. "It can be a wonderful opportunity, even though it doesn't feel that way."

Whereas in the past a job loss often sent an underlying message that the employee was in some way incompetent, says Stovall, today it is a common circumstance and is "no reflection" on the worker. "Very, very good employees are finding themselves looking for jobs. People have every reason to expect that they will be employed quickly. The jobless rate is still low."

Beverly Smallwood, psychologist and owner of Magnetic Workplaces (www.magneticworkplaces.com) in Hattiesburg, Miss., echoes Stovall's optimism. "There are good jobs out there for good people," she says. "The prospects are excellent that you'll get a good job or an even better job."

And Stovall and Smallwood agree, while all people experience a range of emotions when they have lost a job—from denial and depression to anxiety and anger—women may be able to move on a little faster than men.

The experts contend that because women often have multiple roles—in other words they are defined by their jobs and as mothers or caregivers, job loss may not be as devastating to them as it is to men who may find their primary self-esteem in work. For men, Stovall says, "their job is who they are."

Additionally, women tend to express emotions more freely

than men do and may already be connected to sources of emotional support.

Specifically, women friends tend to talk about their relationships and feelings, while men friends tend to do activities together, says Smallwood.

She points out that despite these advantages, women job hunters need to be aware that they are more likely than men to dismiss their skills, often assuming that "anyone could do what I do."



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Stovall says that men are more assertive about asking for support from their soon-to-be-ex employer. She urges women to take action: See if severance packages and outplacement services are available.

Other expert tips to help you bounce back include:

- Help yourself heal. Allow time to adjust to your situation, knowing that you may feel shocked at first and that grief is a normal reaction after a significant loss. "You won't stay there if you face it, feel the hurt, and move through it," says Smallwood.

She also suggests keeping things in perspective. "It is not the end of the world or the end of your career. It's just the end of

this phase of your career, and the beginning of another."

- Reassess. Both experts emphasized that it's vital to appraise yourself and your prospects. Take stock of the skills and strengths that you can contribute to an organization, says Smallwood.

- Also, thinking about what you will miss the most about your old job will help identify what to look for in the next one. For instance, says Smallwood, if you will miss your team members the most, you'll know you want a job where people work well in groups.

Stovall adds that if you can afford it, this also could be a good time to go back to school to learn new skills.

- Start calling people and tell them what you have to offer. Keep a list and write down anyone you can think of who might be helpful. Says Smallwood: "Networking is one of your most powerful assets."

Stovall notes that the best jobs are found through friends and acquaintances.

And, she adds, be sure to use online resources, to find both career opportunities and sources of support, such as chat rooms where you can share your job-hunting experiences. You may want to look into the services of a career development center.

- Be upbeat. As Stovall says, "People have every reason to be optimistic. Surround yourself with positive people."

Smallwood points out that periods of major change often turn into our most creative times. "Let the lack of structure in your life at this time work for you," she says. "Consider possibilities and opportunities you would not have thought of if you had your old job and routine."

A final common-sense reminder comes from Stovall: Remember that it's easier to stay upbeat if you take good care of yourself. That includes getting exercise even if your job hunting and home life are keeping you busy.

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