

## Layoffs: Taking the Right Emotional Action

**The words** that many people are most afraid to hear today are, “**you are laid off.**” When receiving this 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.” **Anger** may manifest itself 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**, the expression “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 more often a nature 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 fact, may impede finding a new position. Once the thoughts that support anger and “rejection of the company” 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 up the time to resilience or recovery. To arrive at this point, the individuals must create a new mental process by thinking differently about the event:

- They can tell themselves that even though they are experiencing negative thoughts they also realize that they still have a great deal of talent.
- They can remind themselves that they have the confidence within themselves to be successful when they move on to a new position.
- They need 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 them better for the next position.

The emotions of anger and rejection at this point are replaced by a new **healthier emotion of acceptance** and a willingness to move on. Once the person reaches the acceptance stage, the commitment to find another job is the positive response to the negative situation of being laid off.

A layoff can be viewed as a painful and devastating period disguised as a great opportunity to advance. Look at the situation in a positive light and ask what has been learned through this work and layoff experience. Have the confidence within oneself to write a new resume, network effectively, present positively in an interview, and accept another position. **Refocus on opportunities** from past positions that can be used to best

benefit in new positions. Review what training and certifications were attained in prior positions and list what opportunities 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 understanding emotional reactions, being ready to begin a new position with self-development thoughts, and then moving on to a positive and challenging new opportunity.

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

- Buy a notebook and begin keeping a journal outlining all the actions that you will take.
- Outline your emotions, how you are feeling, the situation that triggered each emotion, and the best/worse case outcomes.
- Outline professional skills and knowledge, personal skills and abilities.
- Locate the appropriate professional organizations in which to network.
- Become more active.
- Challenge yourself to maintain a positive attitude about the present situation and the future.
- To begin the job search process, write in the journal all the talents that you have demonstrated in past positions.
- Simulate an interview.

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.