**Bouncing back when You recently Lost your Job**

Lost your job within the past six months?

Perhaps you are feeling that your whole world has come to an end. No wonder, because people often define their whole sense of identity around their work. Their work is who they are as a person, it gives them self-confidence, they build friendships at work, it provides them with a daily routine and sense of security, it is their source of income to look after their families and purchase luxuries. When you lose your job, you lose all of these.

**Your reaction to job loss**

Grief is a normal reaction on any loss. You can expect to go through quick changes in your emotions. Let us look at the stages most people go through:

* **Shock**

Directly after you hear the news, you may feel shocked, with tightness in your chest, a racing heart, shortness of breath. You may have feelings of fear and anxiety. You can have problems sleeping and cry more often and think about the loss continuously.

* **Denial**

At first you may find it hard to believe that you lost your job and itmay take a couple of days to start **believing** and coming to terms with the shocking news of the lay-off.

* **Anger**

As a result of being unable to deal with the circumstances of unemployment, you might become easily **irritable** and in most instances agitated and **frustrated**. You may start asking “Why me?” and feel that you have been treated unjustly and resent the employer and feeling envy towards those that are still working.

* **Criticising yourself**

You might start bringing up all the issues that you could have done differently, to keep your work and criticise your own self-worth as a worker. You will find that you often talk about: “If only I did….”, “I must not be any good”, ”Perhaps I am a failure as a person.”

* **Withdrawal, sadness and depression**

Many people withdraw from others and keep to themselves, to avoid difficult questions. People need alone time to grief. Job loss can shake our feelings of self-worth, personal security and personal control. After the job loss people will have to give up their social contacts, the roles that people find meaning out of. Being separated from normal routine that you find from the job, would cause a disconnection in your life. Feelings of **inadequacy** may arise due to seeing others continuing with their normal routine. You may sink into a deep sadness when you realise things are not going to change.

* **Acceptance**

At some point **reality** will sink in and you would have to come up with solutions as to how to generate income and seek for a job again. Job loss is then accepted as a fact of life. You begin to take stock of your career abilities and start a job-hunting process.

**Overcoming grief**

By recognising the different stages of grief after a job loss, you can overcome your emotions much quicker. Accept that these feelings are a normal response for everybody going through loss. This will also help you not to stress even further about having them and to move into job search more quickly.

**Bouncing back**

Resilient people bounce back from set-backs easily and quickly. It is critical for you to bounce back as soon as possible after job loss, so that you can start looking for another job. Waiting too long can put you in a routine of doing nothing, losing motivation and morale altogether and you may slip into long-term unemployment, which is even more difficult to come out of. Employers are not keen to take on people who have long gaps in their work records.

Here are some tips for bouncing back quickly:

* **Keep a journal about your feelings**

Keeping a journal of your feelings and thoughts will help you to express your hurt and anger and deal with them in a healthy manner.

* **Do not blame yourself**

Many people lose their jobs due to companies that fail or perhaps even through their own actions. Accept that the job loss happened and that you need to move on as soon as possible to fend for yourself.

* **Overcome your anger**

When you feel like lashing out, then you should consider expressing your feeling to someone you can trust instead of lashing out at innocent people. Being angry too much can make you feel worse and keep you stuck instead of moving on.

* **Mix with positive people**

Being on your own to comfort yourself may provide temporary relief, but it is not constructive-meet with positive people to keep your spirits up and give you hope.

* **Look for the upside of the job loss**

Look for the upside in the job loss-perhaps the job loss will give you time to think about what you really want out of a career and a chance to study further.

* **You are not inadequate due to job loss**

Never blame yourself for losing your job even if you feel that you need to blame someone. The job loss is not a rejection of who you are. Rather see the job loss as an unforeseen temporary set-back and an opportunity to grow. How you interpret your job loss will determine whether you will be able to overcome the los and find work more quickly.

* **Network**

Join groups of people-many people find jobs through their circle of friends, family, clubs and other connections. The more people there are that know that you are looking for a job, the better your chances are for help. Other work-seekers can be a valuable source of support and advice-join a job-hunting group through contacting the Career Counsellor at your closest Labour Centre. Such a network will also help you to stay connected to life when you lost your network at work.

* **Focus on the future**

It is self-defeating to focus on the past; you cannot change your past, but have talents to shape your future! Focus on your future and get active to plan your job search as soon as possible.

* **Get a new routine**

Build a new routine for yourself-get a diary and plan your day with a start time and finish time. Following a set routine will help you to be more productive and prevent you from losing motivation. Getting exercise and looking for a job could form part of your routine.

* **List your positive traits**

Make a list of your positive characteristics, for example your accomplishments and successes as well as personal characteristics. Read through the list often to help you keep positive. The list will also help you when a new job opportunity comes up.

* **See job-search as a job**

After job loss, some people want to take a break and rest. Do not take too long to start looking for another job. You can fall into the habit of not wanting to do anything! Remember, your available money will not last forever. Plan your day and set goals in terms of job-hunting, for example on Monday I will register myself as work-seeker with the Labour Centre and on Tuesday I will attend the job-hunting session at the Labour Centre. On Wednesday I will buy newspapers and check for vacancies. On Thursday I will do an internet search for jobs and on Friday I will phone a number of companies.

* **Focus on issues you can control**

You cannot control whether an employer takes you on-do not dwell on this too long. Rather remain focused on your job search and on putting in more applications. Remember it takes very many applications before you will find a new job.

* **Consider other alternatives**

Finding another job is not the only option after job loss. Consider your alternatives and study further, volunteer at welfare organisations, start a small business. The Career Counsellor at the Labour Centre can provide employment counselling to advise you what next step you should take in your career and about job and skills development opportunities that are available and to which you can be referred.

**More advice**

The website of the Department of Labour has much advice on how to cope with job loss and to prepare you for the world of work. There is more advice on dealing with the stress of job loss, dealing with money matters and how to obtain support from your family and friends as well as where to look for a job. Read these fact sheets on [www.labour.gov.za](http://www.labour.gov.za), go to “Useful documents” and then to “Public Employment Services.”

Remember, keep active, stay focused and find a job or other opportunity as soon as possible.

**Sources**

Straits, Don: Emotional Stages of Job Loss: www.theladders.com