

What to Do When You've Been Laid Off

Simple Strategies for Securing Your Next Job



Getting laid off can be one of the most devastating events in a person's life. But it doesn't have to be. The massive layoffs of 2008 have taught us that there are a number of tried-and-tested ways to bounce back after a layoff. In some cases, you might even end up better off than you were before. Think of the old saying, "When one door closes, another one opens." Getting back into the job market after a layoff can lead to more and better opportunities than you could ever imagine.

In this guide, we are going to be talking about dealing with being laid off in terms of both the emotional and the practical aspects. Taking these practical steps should hopefully secure you the job of your dreams.

Let's get started with one of the most difficult aspects of being laid off - dealing with the shock of becoming unemployed.

Dealing with the Shock of Getting Laid Off

Dealing with the shock of getting laid off is one of the most stressful things a person will ever have to overcome. It triggers all sorts of emotional issues, as well as practical ones related to what to do next. Dealing with the emotional side is the only way to get over the paralysis that often comes with such bad news. There's A LOT to do once you are laid off, so you need to be at your best.

The first thought for most people is, "Why me?" They often feel that they might have done something to deserve being laid off. This might potentially be true if they haven't been working their best. However, in most cases, a layoff is a purely financial decision on the part of the company, and not something to be taken personally. It often means either the most expensive personnel, and/or people considered to be surplus personnel, are laid off.

If you are only one of a small number of people getting laid off, this can be extremely distressing. If you are part of a large number of people who are laid off, such as occurred in 2008 and 2009, you might take some comfort from the fact that you were one of many. However, you might also be worried that there will be many people just like you looking for the same jobs.

This being the case, it is important to be clear about what to expect once you are laid off, and to know your rights. It also means rolling up your sleeves and getting the jump on everyone else by starting to look for a new job despite feeling devastated.

The Impact on Loved Ones of Being Laid Off

This positive can-do attitude is particularly important if you have a spouse/partner and children who are depending on your income. It can be devastating when your paycheck suddenly vanishes overnight. It can be even worse if you get laid off at certain times of the year, such as just before the end-of-year holidays.

But you can survive even this if you are honest and proactive. You should already have a household budget in place, but if you don't, this should be your first step. Note down the essentials each month, such as rent/mortgage, food, utilities, internet, car or transportation

expenses, and so on. Everything else should be considered a luxury until such time as you are earning a steady paycheck once more.

Discussing your new pared-down budget with loved ones old enough to understand what's at stake can go a long way towards taking the financial pressure off you. It is a question of priorities and surviving the tough times by being smart.

Let's look next at the practical aspects of the actual layoff itself, and what your immediate steps will be in the aftermath of this event.

Know Your Rights and Get What You Can

It's hard to think straight when you have just been laid off, but what you do in the immediate aftermath of the layoff can make all the difference between success and failure when it comes to coping with this challenge.

The most important thing is to discover what you are entitled to. The first is severance pay. If companies can afford to, they will offer a severance package to help make up financially to a certain extent for the loss of your job. Severance is not obligatory, however.
<https://www.dol.gov/general/topic/wages/severancepay>

In the US, the [Employee Benefits Security Administration](#) can also help with issues such as this.

There is extra protection for workers over age 40 in [reference to severance pay](#).

It is important to be clear about the terms of the severance package as well - not just in terms of how much money you can expect, but also whether there is anything else involved in it, such as a non-compete clause (and if so, the length of it) or a non-disclosure agreement (NDA). A non-compete might be a tough obstacle to you getting another job in the same niche or industry.

If you are being laid off through no fault of your own, you should be entitled to references from your line manager and any other person in the company who has direct experience of the work you have been putting in and can comment on it in a meaningful way.

If you are being laid off for cause, see if there is someone you have been working with who would be willing to give you a testimonial. You could even ask clients who know you well as long as there is no NDA or non-compete.

Unemployment Benefits

Your next port of call will be the unemployment website and office to determine your level of entitlement and go through the paperwork and interview process, in order to make sure you get the right amount of money and lay the groundwork for returning to employment efficiently.

The sooner you file for unemployment, the sooner you can start getting checks coming in. Often there can be a delay of several weeks, so you should not waste any time in starting the process.

If it is a question of pride regarding unemployment, remember that whenever you are employed, you are paying into an unemployment fund. It is not charity. It is your money, and there as a safety net in case you need it.

You might also wish to consult a labor lawyer just in case you want someone to look over all your termination papers and your severance package. They can often be very helpful with adding useful clauses to the "boilerplate" layoff documents many companies use. In this way, you can feel more certain you are not being harmed in any way and your rights are protected.

Labor lawyers usually charge reasonable consultation fees to look over your paperwork. They can also help you determine if you have a legal case (such as discrimination), or if you think you were laid off for a particular reason no one is admitting to (such as age, gender, race, and so on).

Be clear about how much severance and unemployment you will get, and the payout dates. Evaluate your budget in light of this information and whatever savings you have in the bank. Financial experts recommend that people try to set up an emergency fund that covers at least one to three months of their average household expenses.

However, if you have not been able to put by that amount of money, it will be a case of making the most of what you do have coming in until you find a new job, and getting ready for your big search.

Your next step is to evaluate where you are at the moment in your career, and to polish up your resume and other paperwork needed to help you apply for a new job. Let's look at your next steps with respect to your career.

Is Your Current Career Right for You?

It is only natural to feel eager to get right back to work, but this might actually be the perfect time to do some soul searching as to whether or not you are happy in your career. If you have been laid off for cause, might there be a reason, such as lack of skills or motivation, that held you back from doing your best?

If you not happy with your current career, now might be the best time to consider making a change. Do you still feel highly motivated when you wake up every morning? Or have you had a nagging sense lately that something is missing from your life, or that you could be doing something more or differently?

A career change is not going to be as easy as finding a new job in the same niche or industry, but you will never know unless you try. Research will be key to making a successful transition into any new job. One form of research is to look deeper within, to explore your motivations and what you feel is your mission in life.

It is also important to look for what is termed "transferable skills" - those which can help you succeed in your new career of choice. For example, if you've been working as a teacher, chances are that you are a people person who enjoys working with others and would be a good mentor and leader. You will probably be well-organized and be a self-starter, willing to learn. These are skills that can lend themselves to a wide variety of careers, not just teaching.

Career and Personality Quizzes

One of the best ways to help evaluate if your current career is right for you, and what kind of career would suit you best, is to try some online tests. They take many different forms, but can help narrow down what you are really good at and feel passionate about.

Another reason for taking these tests is that an increasing number of human resources and hiring managers might also ask you to take certain tests in order to determine if you would be a good fit for a particular position.

One of the most common is the [Briggs Myers test](#) - It groups people into one of 16 different types of working personality based on introvert/extrovert and other polarities. Some employers require you to take the test when you come in for interview in order to help narrow down a wide candidate pool based on the test results.

[Self-Directed Search](#) - This inexpensive site helps you "discover your passion." It divides you into one of six different types: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, or conventional, and makes suggestions about the best career and educational opportunities that will suit you.

[My Next Move](#) - This site is free and sponsored by the US Department of Labor. It asks you to rank different tasks according to how interested you are in doing them. It then makes suggestions as to good career options, and how much training it would take for you to enter the suggested careers.

[Pymetrics](#) - This is a fun site where you can play games that will help determine your skills, abilities and interests. By knowing your traits, you can make smarter decisions about your career. You can also get matched up with recruiters.

Taking These Tests

With these kinds of test, honesty really is the best policy. There is no "right" answer. Don't try to second-guess yourself. It is far better to work in a job than that really suits you than to take any old job just to make ends meet and end up suffering. These tests can help you find the right job and career based on who you really are.

It's also important because knowing what you want and need can help you avoid a patchy career with short gigs and gaps in between. The last thing you want is an inconsistent-looking resume, because it will raise red flags with hiring managers.

Changing Careers

These assessments can help you determine whether or not to switch careers. It can be part of your research process as to whether or not it is a good idea, and what training and experience you need to make the change. You will need to reorganize your resume with this in mind.

The tests can help you with keywords and buzzwords that will be of interest for hiring managers. They can also help you plan the best ways to break into your intended new career, such as an internship, part-time work and so on. While you are unemployed might be the perfect time to explore your options.

Once you are reasonably certain as to whether or not you want to remain in your current career or branch out into a new one, it will be time to start updating your resume. Let's look at this in the next section.

Preparation Is Key to Finding Another Job

If you're like most people, your resume is gathering dust on your hard drive and hasn't been touched for quite a while. Now is the time to put your best foot forward, so you can really impress hiring managers in your new job search.

Brainstorming

Start by brainstorming everything you have been doing in your most recent position. Think in terms of action verbs such as:

- Create
- Supervise
- Manage

This will show that you are an active worker who has been responsible for projects, people and so on.

Specific Accomplishments

Include specific accomplishments in the form of a brief example of what you did, what happened and what the positive outcome was. Examples include:

- Launched X product, which increased revenue by \$Y
- Streamlined processing of Product A, which decreased costs by \$B
- Grew Facebook followers from 10,000 to 25,000 in one year

...and so on.

Note down anything you got praise or recognition for, such as employee of the month, or an email from a supervisor or client thanking you for the great work.

Next, condense the information into a series of eye-catching bullet points, which will make it easier for hiring managers to read.

Go through the same process for your previous posts. If you are trying to change careers, create a second copy of your resume and rewrite it with a view to emphasizing the transferable skills that will be of most use in the new industry you wish to work in.

Long-Form to Shorter Resumes

It is okay to have more than one resume. Your long-form resume can be edited down to cater to each job you are applying for. It will take longer to fill out each application, but think quality and good fit rather than quantity or applications cranked out.

In most cases, you will be applying online anyway, in which case you will be copying and pasting the data into the specified sections. Note that there will usually be character limits and sometimes entry limits.

Length of Resume

Some professionals say your resume should only be a page long, but this is pretty unrealistic - especially if you have been in the workforce for more than 15 years. If this is the case, you don't need to list every job you ever had, only the most relevant ones. Try to keep it to two pages, with generous margins and a readable font such as Times New Roman 12.

References and Testimonials

The more, the better. You don't have to use them all, but it helps to have a variety. Make a list and check it to make sure you have all the correct contact information, such as cell phone and email.

Note that in some cases, they might ask for professional references and character references too.

Keywording

Be sure to use the keywords in your resume that an employer would be most likely to use when searching for someone with your skills and abilities.

Error and Typo-Free Work

Make sure you spell check your resume. Also, print it out on paper and proofread it. If you are nervous about your spelling and grammar, or want an independent assessment of the quality of your resume, consider spending the money on a resume service.

Corporate Research

It's easy to get excited and apply for everything that looks like a good fit, but slow down and look up each company on Glassdoor.com and CareerBliss.com before you start to fill out the application. It is important for you to be a good fit for a job, but it also has to be a good fit for you. A company where everyone is miserable and never gets promoted will never be ideal.

Note that this research can also come in handy if you make it to the interview stage. You can use it to ask intelligent questions about the job you are applying for.

Once you have your resume/s ready, you should be feeling more confident about your job search. But before you start digging into all of the job search sites, it is important to tap into your network. Let's look at this topic next.

The Importance of Contacts / Networking

When you get laid off, it is only natural to feel a bit dejected and perhaps even embarrassed that you have lost your job. However, not telling people what has happened can be one of the biggest mistakes you can make. Experts estimate that around 70% of jobs in the US never get listed publicly. They are part of what is called the hidden job market.

The hidden job market is basically jobs that are filled through contacts and networking. It isn't always a case of what you know, but also who you know. Therefore, if people find out that you are available, and you have a good reputation in your industry, you might not even have to look for a job. Offers will start coming to you.

Tap into the Contacts You Have

This may sound like a dream come true. And it can be, provided you are ready to network like a pro. Think of all the contacts that you have associated with your industry or the new industry you would like to start working in. Think about friends, family, neighbors and so on who might know people who could use your services. Print up business cards with your contact information on the front, and brief bullet points on the back, and hand them out as appropriate.

Don't be shy. Chances are that even if the person does not need your services, they might keep the information at the back of their mind and refer you to others. Also, remember that people do business with people they like. This being the case, if you are friendly, personable, and well-spoken, chances are you will stick in their mind. Then if a person needs, for example, a web designer, they might instantly think of you.

If you don't think you are a "people person," practice. Go out of your way to talk to people. Remember, their favorite subject will usually be themselves. Listen and learn what people's needs and concerns are. Then think about the kinds of solutions you can offer if they mention your niche or industry.

Network in Person

Networking in person can be a bit embarrassing if you are shy. However, it is always a good idea to practice an elevator speech to get the ball rolling, and answer the basic questions of who you are and what you do.

Write a 15- to 30-second description of the essentials, then practice it until it comes naturally to you. Think of people in your niche or industry and their main problems. What problems do you solve? Include those in your elevator speech and you are bound to pique people's interest.

Another place to network is your local Chamber of Commerce. It offers free courses, talks and so forth that can help business owners succeed. If you can come up with a great idea for a presentation, offer yourself as a guest speaker and use the opportunity on the platform to show what you know. You will be able to network with all sorts of people at the event, and it is a great chance to hand out business cards and connect with people who can really use your services.

Your Social Media Presence

At least 70% of recruiters and human resource managers admit that they shortlist candidates for jobs based on what they find out about each candidate through social media. This being the case, it is important to have a great LinkedIn profile. You also need to make sure that your

social media presence is not going to embarrass you. If your full name is on it anywhere, it might be time to edit it.

For example, check your Facebook account, Twitter feed and so forth to make sure that there is nothing there that would raise any red flags with a human resources manager or a recruiter. Partying tales, embarrassing photos and so on need to be deleted or hidden. Think of your profiles as a way to showcase your professionalism. You can create a new one, of course, to try to cover over your old accounts, but if you do this, you will need to publish a large amount of useful content to show what you know.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is the main social network for professional people to connect with one another. It is also the most trusted of all networks. Why? Because people can't hide behind a cloak of anonymity. The whole point of the site is to connect with others through your work history and educational history, which will be "verified" in a number of ways, including by people you know connecting with you.

A full, detailed LinkedIn profile can be just as good, if not better, than your resume, but honesty is the best policy. The two need to be consistent with one another. Your profile will also allow you to link to publications, PowerPoint presentations, and more. It will take several hours to create a great profile and it requires regular activity and upkeep of the profile, but it is a great way to position yourself as a thought leader in your niche or industry.

LinkedIn Groups

Your profile is the gateway to LinkedIn groups about various topics. Join the ones that make the most sense for your niche, industry and interests.

Connecting with Thought Leaders

Follow thought leaders' accounts, and interact with the content. It will make you more visible in your niche or industry and earn you more followers in return.

Your SlideShare Account

SlideShare.net is the number one presentation sharing site on the internet. It is now owned by LinkedIn. This being the case, you can boost your profile by uploading useful PowerPoint or other types of decks and linking to them. They are short, attractive ways to help you show what you know, and why you are worth paying attention to and working with.

Recruiters

LinkedIn is used heavily by recruiters looking for top people to slot into positions they have been hired to help fill. They get a percentage or finder's fee for every person they slot into a vacancy. They often know about jobs that are never listed.

Companies hire recruiters because they trust that they know the right people and the demands they require from their staff. Recruiters save them the screening process and only connect them with people they think will be a good fit. Being on LinkedIn gives you ample opportunity to be

contacted by a range of recruiters. Keywords will help drive your visibility. The paid level of LinkedIn can offer you even more opportunities.

You can also work with recruiters in person. Look for ones who specialize in a particular niche or industry - for example publishing, website design, and so forth.

As you can see, there's a lot to do once you become unemployed. In fact, there can be so much, it is easy to get overwhelmed. Let's look next at the importance of having a daily routine when you are unemployed, so you can get back to work more quickly.

The Importance of Having a Daily Routine When You Are Unemployed

Most of us are so used to the 9-to-5 and bosses telling us what to do that being unemployed can be a real shock to the system. While it might be nice to enjoy a bit of freedom for a day or so, being too relaxed can have negative consequences and prevent you from getting back into a great job quickly.

It's tempting to hang out in your PJs all day, watch TV, or tackle all the chores around the house that you didn't have time for when you were working full time. However, studies have shown that psychologically, it is very important to maintain a daily routine similar to a regular working day even when you are unemployed, for a number of reasons.

A regular routine will keep you motivated and help maintain momentum.

It is amazing how fast the time can go with little getting accomplished, if you are not strict with yourself. Maintaining a schedule with a checklist of things to do related to your job hunt can help keep you on track.

It is also important because the larger the gap in your resume, the more questions your resume will raise in the eyes of hiring managers.

A Checklist of Action Steps

Here are a few of the essentials you need to do every day.

- Set a waking time.
- Shower and dress in clothes decent enough for anyone to see you in as you network around the neighborhood, including the coffee shop and supermarket. Carry business cards with you at all times in your wallet or purse. Print out more as needed.
- Have breakfast - it's brain food.
- Get to your desk at a reasonable time.
- Set a timer for chores such as email and social media so they don't take up your time. Use Google Timer or an app on your phone.

- Create a professional-looking email address for your job hunt, and check it first each day. A separate email will help ensure you don't miss any important communications amid a sea of junk in your regular email box.
- Add your resume to top sites such as Monster.com. This can take time.
- Apply for jobs:
 - Read through the description to see if you would be a good fit.
 - Research the company to see if it would be a good fit for you.
 - If yes, fill out the application. Edit your resume as needed to emphasize the skills they are looking for in the job description.
 - Check dates, and make sure the right information goes into the right fields.
 - Check for typos.
 - Write your cover letter. Use it to explain why you are interested in the job, and why you would be a good fit. An easy trick is to copy and paste the exact requirements and match your skills to them.
 - Keep a file folder on your desktop of all this work, job descriptions and so on, so you can refer to it again if you get to the interview stage.
- Be prepared for phone calls. Some are just a fact-finding mission, while others are a preliminary interview that will help a hiring manager or recruiter determine whether or not they want to invite you in to speak with you further.
- Keep a paper calendar to note down calls and interviews.
- Schedule regular meal and exercise breaks on your calendar.
- Check your LinkedIn page for recent communications. Follow up as needed.
- Update your website if you own one.
- Create a portfolio site of samples of work in your chosen field.
- Check your social media accounts. If there is embarrassing content, delete or hide. If there is too much you would not want prospective employers to see, create new accounts and add interesting content.
- Consider opening accounts at popular freelancing sites like Upwork and Fiverr. You can gain experience as well as cash.
- Watch out for distractions. Keep your work area clutter free and media free except for your phone.
- Set up a home office. Create a place for everything and keep everything in its place. This will save you a great deal of time.

- Keep your computer organized. Give meaningful names to your files so you can find, for example, various versions of your resume easily and details on each job/location if you get invited for interview.
- Be sure to have an up-to-date contact information sheet. This should include all the contact information for your referees. Make sure you have permission to use them as a referee. Include name, address, telephone number (business phone and cell phone), and so forth.
- Organize your interview wardrobe. Be sure to clean and press suits, shirts and so on. Polish the shoes and briefcase. If you are a woman and have not had your hair and nails done recently, now is the time to do it. Men, get a haircut.
- Prepare intelligent questions for any interview you are invited to.
- Write a thank you letter to send after the interview. Thank them for their time and recap one or two things you felt went particularly well in order to remind them of who you are as a candidate and why you stand out.
- Set weekly goals and schedules. They might include updating your site, adding more contacts on LinkedIn, and so on.
- Keep to-do lists. This will help you get it all done and not miss anything important.
- Give yourself a check-up from the neck up. It can be hard to stay positive, especially when you are working so hard filling out applications and not getting interviews. Or, you get interviews, but no firm offers. Watch out for signs of dejection, including:
 - Procrastinating
 - Avoiding your work space
 - Doing too much "busy work"
 - Not taking care of yourself with clean clothes, good meals and so on

Remember, looking for a new job could be a sprint, or a marathon. Plan for the marathon and you will not burn out.

Getting laid off can be one of the most difficult times of your life. However, it doesn't have to be. It can prove to be a blessing in disguise, even if this is not immediately obvious at the time. For example, if you've been struggling to get out of bed each morning and find the motivation to get through your day, this is your chance to turn things around.

If you are organized and stay positive, and are proactive about your career, you can lay a solid foundation for success. If you use this time to look within to determine what is most important in terms of your passion and skills, getting laid off could actually open more doors than you could ever have hoped for.

Be organized, honest and positive, and your new career path should be a golden opportunity.