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How to Help People Who Have Lost Their Jobs

10/02 UNL-EAP

People Who Lose Their Jobs Experience:

- Loss of job status
- Loss of supportive office friendships
- Loss of financial security
- Loss of self-esteem
- Loss of social status

1) Shock
2) Anger
3) Grief
4) Acceptance

Stages of Grief/Loss

- Shock/Denial – that it really has happened
- Bargaining – to try to keep the job
- Anger – at the supervisor/university
- Depression – Feeling as if there is not hope, “I won’t be employed again”
- Acceptance – Reinvesting energy into the process of finding a new job/career

Not all employees go through all of these stages in the same way and at the same pace. Not all employees experience all of the stages. The difficulty in adapting to change is often exacerbated by personality structure and the amount of stress/life issues going on in the life of the employee outside of work.

Concerned colleagues can:

- Be Active Listeners –listen without interruption, don’t try to immediately “problem solve” or reply, encourage speaker to tell you more, listen to understand
- Listen on a number of levels – listen for feeling as well as content
- Use Empathy without sympathy – showing concern/caring without conveying that the person is a victim
- Use reframing techniques – Even if there are many negatives in a person’s life, help them focus on what **is** going well. Ex: “In spite of everything, it sounds like you have a family who loves you very much”. “You are losing a job but you have lots of talents and abilities that will help you find a new job”.
- Help keep people on a positive track without sounding too syrupy
- **Communicate hope:**
 - “This is a tough time now. You will be able to get through this time in your life”
 - “Sometimes the darkest hour is just before dawn”
 - “Lots of people have lost their jobs and are now working again. You’ll find a job for you”

Be watchful for those who are really struggling

Most people will be able to recover from losing their jobs. Others will need professional help. These people may be “stuck” in their depression and/or anger and can think of nothing else. In a few rare cases, emergency intervention may be needed. Be alert for these types of comments:

- “I can’t do go on. There is no hope for me; there is no reason for me to live.”

They are often completely devoid of any energy. Eye contact and affect is non-existent. Personal hygiene could be very poor. They are not making any sense.

- Threatening behavior “It’s all John’s fault. I’m going to get him. He’ll pay for this”

They are highly anxious and have trouble focusing.

For more information or to refer an employee, call UNL’s EAP – 472-3107 or 1 (800) 755-2655

Managing the Effects of Reduction-in-Force

Nancy F. Myers, UNL EAP

1. **Managing the Lay-off process** - "In good times, most managers are 80% technically oriented and 20% people oriented. During times of crisis, those numbers should reverse until routine is established again" (Shepler, 2002)
2. **While RIF employees are still in the workplace** – Stages of grief
 - a. **Shock** – (that they have really lost their jobs)
 - b. **Bargaining** – (trying to find a way to keep the job)
 - c. **Anger** – (at the supervisors[s] or university that the decision was unfair)
 - d. **Depression** – (there is no hope of keeping my old job or finding a new job – "I'm too old to find a job, I don't know how to do anything else, No one will hire me")
 - e. **Acceptance** – (reinvesting energy into the process of finding a new job/career)
 - Not all employees go through all of these stages in the same way and at the same pace.
 - Supervisors should maintain regular communication and contact with their employees up until their last day at work, even in the face of hostile reaction.
 - Supervisors should encourage the 'surviving' employees to continue to interact and support the RIF employee, even if it feels awkward. It is essential that the RIF employee is not isolated or shunned.
 - If there is a departmental meeting or retreat scheduled, invite the RIF employee to attend, but do not force.
 - It is recommended that a "farewell" event take place to acknowledge the employee's contributions to the university, allow co-workers and colleagues to say good-bye and give the employee an opportunity for closure.
3. **Survivor issues for remaining employees**
 - a. **Demonstrate that You Value the Survivors**
 - How will you reassure the survivors about their job security?
 - How will you keep your best employees from fleeing (and getting another job)?
 - You don't want your survivors feeling as if they are the victims, especially if they have more work to do – What will you do to enhance morale?
 - b. **Focus on Rebuilding Confidence and Self Esteem**
 - Some employees are worried about having the time and energy to step up to the larger challenge
 - Involve employees in what needs to change as a result of the downsizing
 - c. **Restore Trust and Recognize Emotions**
 - Recognize that survivors are feeling the loss of their colleagues and the "way it used to be"
 - Over communicate
 - As a leader, project positive energy and initiative
 - d. **Rebuild Commitment**
 - Encourage teamwork, creativity and autonomy (determining the way in which an employee conducts his/her work)
 - Acknowledge and encourage good performance,
 - Provide educational or career opportunities
 - Recognize the unique strengths and contribution of each employee

Dealing With Difficult Events – Building Resiliency

UNL Employee Assistance Program

When difficult events such as the death of a loved one, loss of a job, serious illness, terrorism and other traumatic events occur, it is normal to react with a flood of strong emotions and a sense of uncertainty. However, most people can generally adapt well over time to major change and stressful conditions by becoming resilient.

Resiliency is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy or other significant sources of stress (American Psychological Association, 2002). Being resilient does not mean that a person doesn't experience difficulty or distress. Resilient behaviors, thoughts and actions can be learned and developed.

Ten Ways to Build Resilience (adapted from APA, 2002)

- **Make connections.** Build good relationships with close family members or friends. Accept help and support from those who care about you and will listen to you. Being active in civic groups, faith-based organizations or social support groups can help. Assisting others in their time of need can benefit the helper.
- **Avoid seeing crises as insurmountable problems.** What you say to yourself about highly stressful events can make a difference. Saying "I can get through this" for example, is much better than "I'm going to lose myself".
- **Accept that change is a part of living.**
- **Move towards your goals.** Develop some realistic goals. "What's one thing I know I can accomplish today that helps me move in the direction I want to go?"
- **Take decisive actions** rather than detaching completely from problems and stresses and wishing they would just go away.
- **Look for opportunities for self-discovery.** Many people who have experienced tragedies and hardship report that they have grown in some respect as a result of their struggle with loss.
- **Nurture a positive view of yourself.** Develop confidence in your abilities and trust your instincts.
- **Keep things in perspective.** "This too, shall pass."
- **Maintain a hopeful outlook.** Expect that good things will happen in you life. Try visualizing what you want, rather than worrying about what you fear.
- **Take care of yourself.** Pay attention to your own needs and feelings, engage in relaxing activities, and keep your mind and body healthy.

The key to building resilience is to identify ways that are likely to work well for you as a part of your own personal strategy.

Ask yourself: What have I done to help myself in the past when times were tough – to whom did I reach out - what helped me feel more hopeful about the future? Getting help when you need it is crucial in building your resilience – your EAP is available at 472-3107 or 1 (800) 755-2655.