



Surviving Unemployment: How to Keep Your Head After Losing Your Job

Millions of people are out of work and many more will lose their jobs. Even in good times there are large numbers of people who get fired, usually due to nothing about their own performance at work. Losing your job can be one of the most difficult experiences that you will face, so knowing how to cope with the time in between your last job and your next job will be important. We know that people who are unemployed are more likely to feel depressed, over- drink, binge eat, or even think about suicide. Your unemployment can affect your marriage, make it difficult to handle your financial pressures, and make you feel hopeless and ashamed.

You are not alone. But there are ways of coping with these difficulties that can help. Let's take a look.

1. *Realize you have a right to your feelings.* You may be feeling angry, sad, anxious, and even hopeless. You have these feelings because you are human. These are your feelings and no one can take them away from you. But realizing your right to have painful feelings doesn't mean you can't do anything to make things better. You can.
2. *Accept that you have a problem.* Protesting, getting angry, being resentful are all natural reactions. But they will only make you feel worse. Accepting that there is a real problem that requires coping is the first step in coping with the real problem. Being resentful won't help you. It makes sense -- emotionally -- that you feel this way. But you might get stuck in where you are and not able to make the best of a bad situation.
3. *Normalize the problem.* You are not alone. Everyone you know will likely know someone beside you who is unemployed or has been unemployed. Unemployment is part of the economy -- for almost every family and friend.
4. *Your job is to look for a job.* Like a lot of people in-between jobs you may be tempted toward passivity and isolation. This will only make you feel worse. Give yourself a job every day to do something to look for a job or become better prepared for a job. Schedule time and activities such as searching on the Internet, contacting friends, family and former colleagues, acquire new skills, apply for jobs, and develop active strategies. But don't become consumed. Limit this search for a job to specific hours during the day. Then balance your day with other activities.
5. *Do things that are fun.* You don't have to be miserable in-between jobs. Many people find that they can now have the time to do what they didn't have time to do before. Exercise,



see friends, spend more time with the kids, learn something new, travel, and generally keep busy. Schedule these activities and do them. It's as good as Prozac for some people.

6. *Don't ruminate.* You seem to have a lot of time on your hands -- alone with your negative thoughts. Dwelling on the negative -- which we call "rumination" -- will only make you depressed. Catch yourself with this rumination, set it aside for a "rumination time" (20 minutes per day) and get out a "menu" of pleasurable, helpful, and meaningful activities to do now. Acting is often better than over-thinking.
7. *Be your own best friend.* You don't need to put yourself down to motivate yourself. Try to be supportive, compassionate -- even "loving" toward yourself. You are going through a rough time. You need yourself to be on your side. Try to think of how you would support your best friend if he or she were going through this experience. Now treat yourself as well as you would treat your friend.
8. *Connect with others.* You may feel ashamed, depressed, that no one will understand. But you need the distraction, support and fun that you can get from others. I know that I have felt better when I have been there for family or friends who are going through a difficult time. Give your friends the opportunity to be your friends. Connecting with others helps you realize that you are something more than the person with the job. You are a friend, a brother, sister, son or daughter.
9. *Connect with a larger community.* Rather than isolate yourself, connect with volunteer organizations, church or synagogue, professional organizations, or any group that gets you outside of your head. Helping others can be the best way to help yourself.
10. *Give yourself time.* You may feel a sense of urgency to get a job today. You might, but then again, you might not. Following the guidelines here may not necessarily get you a job, but may help you cope with this time for now. But be ready to give yourself more time -- stretch your time to create more opportunities. Be flexible about what you would accept, what you can do, and when you need to do it.

These 10 pointers may not work all the time. You may already be using these ideas. But keep yourself focused on taking care of yourself so that you don't lose yourself after you lose your job. You need to be there -- in your own corner -- to help you through this difficult time.

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