

1. Surfing a Sea of Emotion
2. Getting Out and Letting Go
3. Tunnelling Out
- 4. Rowing or Drifting?**
5. Cashing Your Reality Check
6. Fear of Trying

# JOB LOSS

## *Rowing or Drifting*

Margaret, age 58, was seven months short of 40 years service when her company shutdown. It was December and she'd planned vacation. Instead, she "...wanted to be there to see what's happening," and was stunned a few days later to learn there was "...no severance, no vacation pay, no nothing!"

After we have confided in everyone that will listen, we can be tempted to wallow in our unemployment. There is absolutely nothing wrong with taking some time to adjust and regroup as long as we are doing something productive other than thinking about the old job, calling up former co-workers to gossip, or mentioning the event every time someone makes contact with you. If this sounds familiar, you may be beginning to drift away from recovery.

Researchers have found that depression, financial hardship and social assertiveness accounted for differences in recovery between individuals. For example person A who is connected to a wide social network in a family with a good second income and is outgoing and communicative will generally do better than person B who is shy, withdrawn, living alone on social assistance. About the second type, "those are the people I worry about the most," says John, a vocational counsellor.

"My darkest moments stayed with me for about two months," Margaret said. "But once I was able to get involved at the Action Centre, I found myself again." To transform emotional turmoil into recovery we need to embrace at least three things: a belief that we have a problem; a belief that there is a solution; a belief that we are able to use the solution. How others support or undermine these beliefs will affect the effort we put into mobilizing resources for re-employment.

As we begin to mobilize resources and make the transition to a new vocation, most individuals report feeling as if an enormous weight suddenly had been lifted. You may feel highly energized, even joyful as you actively engage support, resources and solutions. Most individuals start to open up to advice and ideas from others. This new openness also makes us vulnerable to bad advice. "The guys at my

husband's work talked about buying some of the equipment and going into business on their own," said Vicky. "But they were all production people with no customers or marketing experience."

When individuals refuse to experience and work through their painful feelings, the outcome can be far short of our objective—full acceptance of a new situation and vocation. If we fixated with the shock, fear and denial of our situation, we can begin to obsess. "I had a client who drove past the plant at 8:30 every morning," one counsellor reported. These individuals may associate their identities with past employment. "I used to be a shift supervisor at ABC Corporation." Even a union hall or employment centre can serve an obsessive focus on the past when the "walking wounded" gather to gossip, rehash the past, and savour their anger.

The benefits of re-employment may be short-lived when we chose an inappropriate job-seeking strategy or continue to experience loss. When Lillian was laid off from her inside production job, she quickly landed a new position as a call centre operator. It was not a good fit and she was terminated after one month. Accepting the first job that comes along to short-circuit the pain of depression, may result in subsequent job loss and a return of even greater emotional pain. In these cases, finding re-employment may be especially tough because most research suggests that depression prolongs unemployment

So who can help? Anybody who is in your social network—at church, sports, at an employment centre, anyone you can call today and not have to introduce yourself. Reaching out will feel risky. Even something as simple as volunteer work may feel awkward initially. But, the reason to do it is not so much to feel immediately more connected but to start down that path.

### Job Search Fitness

Don't blame yourself for your predicament

Stay in touch with people who can help

Be visible instead of hidden at home

Use your imagination to create a plan B

Have flexible employment goals

Find people you can share with and meet regularly

Do something physical every day to lower stress

Try to completely let go of your former job

*Names have been changed to protect the privacy of the interviewees.*

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