SURVIVING A JOB LOSS

The transition from being employed to being unemployed to being meaningfully employed again is an emotional and challenging journey. The six ideas and resources listed below are designed to assist you in the journey and hopefully increase your understanding of what you can do to handle the transition to your next job.

The initial response to a job loss is often shock, and one’s immediate focus is on the negative consequences (anger, stress, lost wages, uncertainty, fear of the unknown future, feeling unappreciated, wanting to get even). The job loss affects every aspect of your life and it is difficult to see any positives or opportunities created by this crisis. Mostly, you are struggling with uncertainty and wondering how you will get through the day, let alone the next month or longer.

1) Give yourself time to grieve the loss. The ripples of a job loss can go far and wide – loss of income, security, status, prestige, and sense of control. In addition, one can be disconnected from the social network (work friends) developed through the workplace, and the loss of the daily structure of a job can lead one to feel powerless, helpless, lost, devalued, or weak. Feelings of guilt, shame, or blame are not uncommon. Job loss can bring forth the same emotions one feels when someone close dies – shock, fear, anger, denial, sadness. It can be helpful to keep a journal as a way to process your thoughts and feelings, and hopefully, move you forward to acceptance and adjustment.

**RESOURCE:** Here are two websites related to Surviving the Job Loss:
http://www.rileyguide.com/cope.html
http://www.familycorner.net/jobloss/index.htm

2) Take time to process the losses with people you trust – family, trusted friends, clergy, or a counselor. Others close to you want to understand, support, and help you survive the loss. Setting boundaries on those with whom you choose to share your feelings is a healthy way to process your experiences. It is not healthy to allow the job loss experience to overwhelm every relationship and connection you have. Retelling the circumstances, anger, and hurt of your job loss over and over again to anyone who will listen can reinforce the pain and keep you stuck in the funk. Managing your emotions and processing your experiences in a healthy way will lead you to focus on your strengths, and you will be able to develop a plan to get through this difficult part of your life’s journey.

**RESOURCE:** Check out your church or the local job or community center to see if they sponsor groups for individuals and families affected by job loss.

3) Assess the financial impact of the job loss and develop a realistic financial plan to get you through the short term, 60-90 days, and if needed, the long term, 6-9 months. This may require some immediate and difficult decisions, especially when it impacts children. Budgeting, cutbacks on the accessories (cable, activities, and extras), using coupons, and recycling and restoring the old instead of purchasing new are all ways to help you make it on less. Life will be different and no one knows for sure how long this period of transition will last. Making some changes early, and building on them as you better adjust to the job loss, is a good place to start. Be careful of making drastic and impulsive decisions in the first few days. Take time to think through your situation, consult with family and others, and work to develop a plan to move you through this critical period, rather than react to it.
RESOURCE: Include your family in making decisions about where and how to cut back. Keep this line of communication open so everyone can feel they are a part of the problem solving process. People want to help, let them.

4) Conduct a career assessment and take a new look at your career interests, values, skills/abilities, and personal attributes. Knowing yourself as a marketable product, and knowing where and how to market that product can help you to use your energy wisely when job searching your way to your next position. Develop a realistic plan based on career, family, and interpersonal goals. Is it time to get more training or education? How are skills transferable to other jobs? What can you do in the short term until opportunities improve in your chosen field?

RESOURCE: Get a copy of “What Color is Your Parachute?” by Richard Bolles or set up a time to discuss your career goals with a career counselor. Gannon Alumni can call 814-871-7680 to set up a time to talk with a career counselor.

5) Learn how to job search effectively and create a job search plan that utilizes a variety of strategies and resources. Finding a job is a job, often requiring 30 or more hours a week. It requires that you spend time preparing a professional resume, responding to newspaper or online ads, researching companies, and building a network of people who can assist you in your job search. Knowing how to find a job will help you to make the best use of your time and energy. Make time to participate in family and social activities. Consider volunteering in the community as a productive way to stay busy and possibly make connections.

RESOURCE: Go to the Job Search Resources section of our webpage at http://www.gannon.edu/depts/cdes/jobsearch.asp to learn about traditional and non-traditional job search techniques. Talk with a career counselor to discuss your plan.

6) Consistency + Persistence/Time = Job Search Success. Devote time, energy, emotion, and if necessary, money to complete the daily tasks necessary to make your job search a success. This is a difficult time and it requires that you make adjustments you never thought you would have to make. Commit yourself to “working well every day” on your job search goals, and when the next day begins, commit yourself to another day of “working well” on the job search. Be sure to keep family informed; they want to help, so let them.

RESOURCE: You. A sports psychologist once wrote: “Most people do not succeed, not for the lack of ability, but because they give up too soon.” This means that people often begin a task and then quit because they lose motivation, get bored with the daily task of practicing, or they believe they should not have to work so hard to get what they want. To get through this difficult time, you will need to practice well every day, accept that the results you want will not be immediate, and realize that having a team approach to your job search will benefit you in the long run.