

Managing Career Transition

The following information is provided to help you understand some of the reactions you may experience with the loss of employment. We recommend you read through this information. There may be other people within your household or close circle of support who may also benefit from understanding this information.

Emotional Stages of the Career Transition Process

Reactions to the loss of employment are similar to those of many other loss situations such as the grieving process. Not everyone will experience each of these stages. Also, the duration and order of each stage varies widely among individuals. For example, anger and fear often co-exist. It is important to realize that any reaction you may have is "normal".

Shock

This initial stage generally begins during the termination meeting and can last from several minutes to several days. Shock can be a very unsettling experience and the coping "tools" within the human psyche often trigger the denial stage in order to deal with the unpleasantness.

Denial

This stage, like shock, is usually short-lived. By denying that an event has occurred, one can "buy time" until they begin to move along the process to acceptance.

Fear

Fear is a healthy protective reaction that alerts us to impending challenges and usually indicates that the denial stage has passed. At least some degree of fear is common in the career transition process as people constantly find themselves in new situations

Anger

Often triggered by feelings of betrayal, anger can also be a healthy emotional response as it indicates that we value ourselves. In effect, it energizes us for action. However, anger may be inappropriately directed towards family, friends and associates. Exhibiting anger and cynicism when contacting potential employers can also ruin possibilities for successful re-employment.

Bargaining

This stage often involves a final attempt to resolve the situation by trying to reverse the termination. An example of this stage is the person who approaches his/her former company to work on a contract basis without first exploring any other market opportunities.

Depression

Depression often emerges as the individual begins to acknowledge the finality of the past and contemplate the future. Common thought disturbances that may take place include:

- Generalization - concluding from one experience that an entire situation (e.g. one's career) is hopeless and beyond repair.
- Filtering out the positive.
- Emotional reasoning - creating excuses in an attempt to justify inaction and indecision on one's part.
- "Should" statements - wishing that others or oneself would behave differently. Constantly worrying over situations beyond one's control.
- Internalization - inappropriate feelings of personal responsibility for the actions of others.

It is a paradox that experiencing any or all of these reactions, and letting them go, creates the space for something new. Use the previous section to monitor your cognitive and emotional patterns regularly and determine what stage(s) you are in. Discuss your situation with your friends and family members and consider help your family doctor can provide.

When identified quickly, accepted, and worked through, depression can be a short-term issue. Almost everyone at some point in their lives has experienced bouts of depression. Receiving support from others and re-learning to value oneself are two ways to help overcome this stage.

There is a positive outcome from working through the early phases:

Acceptance

By this point, the individual has acknowledged what has taken place and is ready to earnestly work toward a resolution of the situation. Overall, an individual's focus is positive and consistent.

Enthusiasm

After accepting the situation, the individual's confidence is usually restored, and his/her efforts are fixed on a successful employment search effort. This stage can last indefinitely, regardless of whether or not an offer of employment has been received, as long as the individual continues his/her efforts and enough reinforcement is received through constructive feedback, interviews, and personal support