

Northern Colorado BUSINESS REPORT

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Suddenly laid off or in career transition?

By Carrie Pinsky

The national unemployment rate hovers around 10 percent and nearly 10 million Americans are unemployed. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 6.3 million people are long-term unemployed which means they have been out of work for 27 weeks or longer. The long-term unemployment rate is trending up as laid off workers find it increasingly difficult to land new jobs.

These facts are dismal but they don't even begin to describe the emotional toll that being unemployed takes on people. Losing a job stirs up intense feelings of sadness, anger, betrayal and fear. Being laid off can come as a devastating shock, eroding confidence and one's sense of self-worth.

Layoffs are so widespread that it has become increasingly clear that the decisions are cost-driven and have little to do with an employee's skill level or value. Yet, a stigma remains. Even though the layoff was not the worker's fault, feelings of shame and disgrace are common.

We live in a culture that values "getting back on the horse." We admire people who buck up and face life's challenges with a positive attitude. There are times when this serves us well but certain life events, such as divorce or being laid off, warrant taking the time to appropriately grieve.

Many people receive their walking papers one day and begin polishing their resumes and reaching out to contacts the very next. This knee-jerk reaction might appear proactive, but it can backfire. Candidates often imagine they are presenting themselves well but hiring managers and recruiters can sniff out emotional baggage like scent hounds on a fox hunt.

Accepting change not chosen

This is precisely why Johnna Bavoso wrote "From Laid Off to Living," a guidebook designed to help people process the emotional aspects of job loss. The book is not about building a better resume or nailing the interview. "From Laid Off to Living" is about grieving loss and learning how to accept change that was not chosen. Bavoso helps people maneuver through the cycle of grief to deal with what she refers to as "The Was and The Is," in order to visualize and create a better "Will Be."

Bavoso has spent her entire career helping people through change. Since 1983, her consulting practice, The People Business Inc., has focused on helping people within organizations effectively manage change. Bavoso realized that the same skills apply to people outside of the workplace.

Last summer, she began facilitating a support group to help laid-off friends and colleagues explore and express their feelings in a safe environment. Less than a year later the guidebook has been published and the Larimer County Workforce offers support groups based on her curriculum. Participants have described the experience as very valuable in helping them through the loss and giving them the skills to move on with life.

According to Bavoso, "Unless people work through the emotional aspects of change, they won't be able to manage the practical side of finding a job or making a career transition."

Laid Off Camp

Laid Off Camp is another innovative program offered through the LCWC. Kevin Buecher and Nick Armstrong developed this playful camp concept to bring people together to explore new career paths. "Laid Off Camp structures learning around the people in the room rather than on a series of slides projected on a wall," the two local innovators explained. "At a typical seminar or conference, there is one expert on the stage sharing information with many people. This can leave participants feeling suppressed and passive."

Laid Off Camp is based on the 'many to many' approach to learning, according to Buecher. "People participate in the truest sense of the word. They are encouraged to tap into and share their inherent talents and strengths which creates a unique learning experience for everyone."

Armstrong adds that participants leave feeling energized and positive about the value they offer. "It really doesn't get any better than that when it comes to empowering people to make positive change in their lives," he said.

You may be one of many people who has faced the grim reality of going home to tell loved ones that you no longer have a job. Don't give short shrift to your emotions, and avoid going into isolation. Working within the context of a supportive group to understand and process your feelings, and to eventually explore what is next, can be extremely beneficial.

Visit the LCWC website at www.larimerworkforce.org for information about these, and many other, free programs available to help people through the emotional, intellectual, and creative challenges of making smooth and successful career transitions.

Bavoso can also be reached at johnna@fromlaidofftoliving.com, and Buecher and Armstrong can be contacted through www.laidoffcamp.com.

Carrie Pinsky also blogs about employment-related topics at The Career Enthusiast on www.ncbr.com.