

Understanding the LOSS in Job Loss

Losing your job or being laid off means more than just losing your income. Leaving your job also involves these additional losses.

Loss of Identity. You no longer work for _____ as a _____. Many people define themselves through their workplace role.

Unemployment may mean the loss of your role as a family breadwinner.

Loss of Way of Life. Saying the final “goodbye” to a job means leaving roles, relationships and tasks that have been a part of your living patterns. It means losing a way of life you may have taken for granted.

Loss of Control. One of the most stressful aspects of losing a job is not knowing for sure what is happening or what might happen. What you are doing wrong or what you can do to fix the situation. Dr. Pauline Boss, University of Minnesota, calls it **ambiguous loss**, a loss that is vague or uncertain.



There is Hope

Not knowing what is going to happen will distress anyone, but you can learn how to live with the ambiguity. Uncertainty can prevent you from making decisions and can immobilize even the strongest man or woman. **But it doesn't have to.**

There is something you can control. You have control over your attitude and your behavior. Every situation, no matter how hopeless at first glance, has some hope. The trick is to take an optimistic stance and identify what is realistically possible.

- Talk to your family first. Share what you do know—good or bad. Don't shelter anyone from bad news. Children don't need details, but should generally know what their parents are worried about.

- Have regular family meetings. Talk together, have fun together. This will strengthen family relationships, which may be tested right now.
- Talk to family members, friends, pastors, or others who will listen to you pour out your feelings.
- Allow yourself to grieve. Label what you are experiencing as an ambiguous loss, and realize it is not your fault.
- Sort your losses into those you can retain (old friends); replace (income); rebuild (a new job using current skills); and relinquish, such as the concept that good jobs last forever.

Focus on what you haven't lost. Celebrate what you still have. Continue with family celebrations and rituals. Simplify them, but don't eliminate them.

MANAGING Tough Times

STRATEGIES to manage emotions

Mixed feelings are normal when you lose your job. Label what you are experiencing as an ambiguous loss. You do not need to feel guilt and shame about your emotions. **It is not your fault.**

Conflicting feelings can cause confusion and drain your energy. When you don't talk about them, they can lead to depression and immobilization. When you deny your feelings, you can't bring closure to the experience and move on with life.

Talking about your feelings with family or friends will help you get some new ideas about how to proceed. Mixed emotions kept to yourself can create marital and family tension.



- Talk about what you believe you have lost, what it means to you, and how you feel about it. Feelings of guilt, shame, sadness, and anger may come up. Or you may feel relief that you no longer have to do a job you did not enjoy.
- Question and examine yourself, not for self-blame, but to identify strengths you can use in another way. What are other options for you?
- Focus on what you still have rather than what you

have lost.

- Recognize the high stress you feel from living with the uncertainty doesn't mean there is anything wrong with you personally.

Recognize extreme stress

Most job loss related stress can be managed. If you're not sure your feelings and reactions are healthy, consult a doctor or mental health professional. Some signs of extreme stress include:

- Feeling depressed, sad, hopeless or unusually agitated for several weeks.
- Hitting, shoving, or lashing out physically and emotionally at a family member.
- Thinking about suicide.

- Feeling overwhelmed to the point that you can't take any action.
- Having panic attacks, where your pulse rate is high and your breathing is difficult.
- Drinking liquor excessively, starting to drink in the morning, or hiding alcohol.

These are all signs of depression, which is a treatable physical condition. Seek help. Don't let unemployment ruin your family and your health.

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