

BEEN FIRED? NEXT STEP – GETTING HIRED!

Has workforce reduction hit you over the head?
Been there – done that – better for it!

By Donna Mazalin



Part 1. Getting past the shock.

We've all experienced it at least once, some of us more than once in our careers. The loss of our job, our income, our stability, our community, and for many of us, part of our identity. We may have felt it coming for some time – something in the air, waiting for that other shoe to drop, part of you in denial that it "can't happen to me." Only once you have accepted the reality of it, can you truly move on.

A friend and a former Chicago Radio personality also served as a management & business communications consultant. She once taught a program to displaced executives titled "Getting Over Getting Fired." Although that was a few years ago, this massive loss of jobs was already becoming a part of our culture. Sadly, this now seems to be the norm. We've lost our jobs. We go through shock, then a bit of mourning. Then, reality hits us over the head when that bank statement is no longer showing deposits. We become seriously concerned about our own spending, our debt, our savings, or our lack of savings. We dread the worse; bill collectors, selling our vehicles, canceling vacations, abstaining from any major purchases. We might even start shopping at the generic discount grocers that we once thought were only meant for the terminally unemployed.

Part 2. Reevaluation of yourself.

This is the time for change. You WILL change employers. Your wages WILL change, for better or for worse. The route you drive or the transportation you once took WILL change. You WILL eventually work with different people and have a different boss. The next organizational culture WILL be different. This is the time to think about these things, now that you've been granted an opportunity to make the change work for you.

A client who had been with one employer for more than 20 years, recently stated that she would only look for a new job that would allow her to drive in a different direction. She was only going to explore opportunities that would take her on another route, as

she so was tired of looking at the same highway, same traffic lights, same buildings, same everything for 23 years.

Another client and former colleague, after many years of high pressure executive roles, was determined to look for a position that would benefit from his skills and experiences, but on a much smaller scale. He would seek less pressure, less people to manage, less of a schedule, and less of a commute. He was seeking a work-life balance. It took getting fired to realize that. Along with his new job, came less salary.

While setting criteria for a new job, you need to be mindful of the other obstacles you might face, especially in this current unemployment market which is still hovering around 6%. Be careful not to put too many conditions on your search. Employers may not be paying the signing bonuses they were a couple of years back. The benefits once offered may have been affected as employers are trying to cut back on many things, before they cut back on their own human capital. Now, very different from a couple of years ago, it is truly an employer's market. Thousands of highly qualified, talented individuals are vying for the same jobs, willing to take pay cuts and lower level positions. All this certainly gives us more to think about. This is an opportunity to improve your own performance potential.

Part 3. Sign up for some training, and then sign up for more...

I can't stress it enough - **Continued Education**. Was there something holding you back from getting a promotion at the previous employer? Was it simply a lack of knowledge of an operation, or of a new software program? Was it just a class, or was it perhaps the lack of a degree? Now is the time to educate yourself even if in small steps. Of course, when out of work, finances can be an issue if pursuing a higher education. If you were at least fortunate enough to be with an employer that has offered outplacement services, you may have access to specialized training through that organization, or to other benefits because of the circumstances.

I experienced my own very sudden loss of a job with a much-beloved company more 10 years ago. Our doors were closed, literally, while thousands of us were working one night. The city of Chicago had also been impacted, by the closure of this organization. While more than 4500 people eventually collected unemployment (6-8 weeks after the fact) there were absolutely no outplacement services or even continuation of health insurance options. COBRA is non-existent when the company has ceased operations. In fact, we have never been compensated for our time worked, or vacation pay due to us. Sounds almost unbelievable – but believe me - it is all too true. However, even in this doom & gloom situation, there were some positive outcomes in that many of us were

able to take advantage of a various programs like Dislocated Workers, Operation Able, and other organizations as we did have some support from the city of Chicago for our retraining needs. Now eleven years later, although many stayed in the same industry, many of my colleagues had to start at the bottom all over again. Many others took the opportunity to continue their education or explore new industries and professions, including yours truly. So one ever knows what door will be opened around the corner from the door that just closed.

Hiring employers want to know what you have done with your life. For example, during an interview, you may be questioned about your growth within an organization if it appears to have been limited to lateral transfers over a period of many years. If you were lucky, you worked for a company that supported your needs financially to continue your education. But if not, what have you done on your own, to improve your skills? Even if it isn't training specific to the job or industry you've worked in - have you considered any personal development? This is your opportunity to do that, and make new contacts in the process!

Part 4. Creating the resume

There is so much to be said for resumes. Point Blank - it is the first impression most employers will have of you, so you need to make it count. I could go on and on about the development of your resume, but that would take on a life of its own. Some of the key factors, are making sure it is readable, accurate, timely, grammatically correct, and more. Having an objective and/or summary at the top is also important, so the recipient of your resume has some idea what you are pursuing without having to spend their own time figuring that out.

Too many resumes get over-looked by employers because they lack direction. Others get passed over because they just seem inappropriate for one reason or another. This could be something that exemplifies your personality, or something that should not be disclosed on a resume. Photos could disqualify you immediately. Unless you are in real estate or car sales, an entertainer, maybe a physician, do not send a photo.

First and foremost, the reason for rejecting resumes, other than a lack of credentials or qualifications, is likely spelling or typographical errors. Depending upon the tolerance of the hiring manager, it won't matter that you are the most qualified, experienced, educated person who appears ideal for the job. Just one spelling error, can eliminate you as a candidate before you even knew you were one. If the details on your resume do not correspond with those on your application, that can also a point of elimination. Be ready to stand by all that you state on your resume and be ready to prove it.

Part 5. Preparing for the interview: Action, Attitude, Appearance!

Search the papers, the internet, company websites, and network – network – network.

Many people think networking is strictly a pastime of business owners or sales people, where sometimes lunch, or cocktails after work becomes the arena for the network. In fact, networking while unemployed can truly be beneficial. No need to run back to the office after a long lunch, no need to worry about the time clock, and you might even be able to wear the same blazer or suit 2-3 days in the same week, when you wouldn't dare think about doing that at the office. While business casual is a concept that is now being re-evaluated throughout many organizations recently as to *its true advantage* towards productivity and creativity, keep the following in mind when you are interviewing or out and about networking. Just because a company has adopted a casual dress code, does not mean you can show up at an interview casually dressed. You are not yet employed, so the dress code does not apply to you. Although you might not be collecting a paycheck, blue jeans may not be the best choice for attire at targeted networking opportunities. This is however, the ideal time for business casual or better. First impressions always count, even in social arenas where some might let their hair down just a bit.

One of the things I've heard most often from those people affected by workforce reductions, is the loss of community. While they use to be overwhelmed by co-workers, subordinates, superiors, customers, vendors, etc., now they are longing for some daily interaction. I should know – I was one of those. Having been in a management role for several years in environments of extremely high volume employees and customers (tens of thousands all day long), I used to pray for a few minutes in one day without interruption, just a few. Although I have in fact been affected by workforce reduction more than once, and in its most extreme way, company closure, the last time around was not due to downsizing. Fortunately, it was my own desire to build a business of my own. However, once I was no longer in the corporate community, I valued it for reasons I would not have thought of before. I then found myself in a bit of a culture shock. Some of the comments I've heard from others who have found themselves suddenly unemployed include:

- “I need a reason to get up and get dressed every day.
- I need a place to go.
- I need others in my field, my age group, etc. to interact with.
- I need a sense of community.
- I need colleagues!
- I never thought I would say this – I WANT TO GO TO A MEETING!!!!”

To be continued.....

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You've probably heard that phrase – "looking for a job is a full-time job". It is fairly accurate. The difference is that we can "work this" job seeking effort in a more flexible and relaxed manner. We can now go check out the competition, something that might have been banned in the past, specifically for those who signed non-compete agreements. Depending on the industry, you might want to try being a customer of the organization you hope to find employment with.

Where can the unemployed network and build a new sense of belonging? What about in that class you are taking to improve your skills or enhance your life? What about attending your local chamber of commerce meetings and find out who those employers are right outside your front door? And while you have this opportunity to make some changes in your life, (i.e. new career direction) why not take advantage of this time and do something for yourself, something you always felt you were too busy for? Try an exercise class, yoga, an art class. Really any self-improvement effort can help you through this time, and could be a life long blessing.

Having that resume ready and available is also key. Keep a decent supply in your car, or your spouse's car, wherever – just have your resume handy. Keep these copies neat and clean by storing them in a sturdy folder or envelope. Drop off your resume wherever you can. Visiting someone in the hospital? Take a walk to the administrative areas and look for job postings. Have those resumes ready to distribute to your classmates, whether in a class on Lotus Notes, or in the lotus position! Visit a restaurant on a regular basis? Go beyond the normal greeting and exchanges. When your server or the manager asks how you are today – be truthful. Say something to the effect of "well things were going great last time I was here, but I just lost my job." This may or may not lead to further discussion, and you certainly don't want to hinder any tip making opportunities of your favorite server by telling him or her every detail. But – you may not know that the employment manager from the high profile organization in the area, has regular lunch meetings there, or comes by with their family every Friday night. Again, you do want to be discreet and still portray a professional image, even when your wages might be now be paid by your state's employment security department. Bottom line – think of everyone you come in contact with as a possible link to your future.

When you finally get called for an interview – get prepared. Think about the questions that may be asked of you. Read management books on interviewing and hiring, not just books geared to job seekers. Here you may learn how your responses are analyzed or why you were asked the questions in the first place. Learn plenty of information about the employer before you show up. This is often a critical point in the screening process, when the employer learns just how serious you are about working for them. Dress appropriately. Don't under or overdress. Ladies – be careful of really heavy make-up or perfumes. It's not a bad

idea to keep an emergency preparedness kit in your glove box; fabric cleaning clothes, facial cleaning tissues, extra hose, deodorant, whatever. You get the idea. Remember, during the interview, you may be somewhat nervous. You will be taking in your surroundings, trying to remember names, how much time you have left on the parking meter, and likely many distracting thoughts. However, the others will be focused on you. They won't necessarily be distracted, and their concentration will be on your responses, your communication skills, your personality, your grooming, and more factors. More often than not, people land a job because they are a cultural fit, not just for the credentials or experience they offer.

After the interview – I cannot stress this enough. If you've never sent a thank you note in your life, now is the time to start. It does not need to be formally structured, or professionally printed. It does need to be sent out within 24 hours of your interview. As far as e-mail thank you notes – don't bother. Most managers do not want the intrusion or interruption by getting e-mails from every candidate they've met. If the employer has made the effort and taken the time and energy to invite you to an interview, your electronic relationship is now over. A typewritten or handwritten note, on stationary or even a blank card, is what is most appropriate. What should you write? A simple thank you for the time and hospitality the employer showed you, reiterating the date of your interview, and the position you are being considered for. Your thank you message should be shorter than the cover letter you first sent. Include a very brief summary of what you have to offer them, remembering the points that they made about the qualities needed in the individual they hire. Then remind them of your sincere interest in the position, the confidence you have to perform this role to exceed their expectations, and the desire to hear from them in the near future.

And when you do – I certainly hope it is due to a great job offer and a brand new start!