

## How to Deal With Job Loss Without Damage to Your Self-Esteem

It is common to feel depressed or ashamed when experiencing job loss, but whether you were laid off or fired, there are ways to boost your self-esteem.

*By Allison Pohle, Wall Street Journal (-American source)*

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***After a job loss, it is important to stay connected to people who will support you.***

***Maintain discipline by keeping up routine in your life.***

***To help you cope after losing your job, consider options such as therapy, meditation and support networks.***

***Take stock of your financial health and, if you are eligible, look into how to file for unemployment.***

Our careers fulfil a number of different functions in our lives, says David Blustein, a professor of counselling psychology at Boston College and author of “The Importance of Work in an Age of Uncertainty: The Eroding Work Experience in America.” Work helps us satisfy our needs to achieve, earn an income, connect with others and feel like the authors of our own stories, he says. In Western cultures in particular, Dr. Blustein says, our jobs are often so integrated into our identities that it is common to feel as though we have lost some sense of self if we lose them. This can take a toll on your mental health. Unemployed Americans polled by Gallup in 2013 were more than twice as likely as those with full-time jobs to say they had been treated, or were being treated, for depression.

Millions of Americans have experienced unemployment during the coronavirus pandemic. If you have lost your job, there are some steps you can take to regain your sense of self.

## **If you have lost your job, it is important to take time to grieve.**

Being laid off is like any other loss, and you need to give yourself time to go through the grieving process, says Ebony Joyce, a career coach and founder of Next Level Career Services. “We have to start the healing process so you don’t go into interviews angry and upset, which can reflect outward,” she says.

## **Reach out to loved ones.**

Although you might be dealing with a range of emotions, it is important not to isolate yourself, says Dr. Blustein. Social support is crucial in times of struggle, he says. “Isolation and loneliness are also really important compounding factors that need to be dealt with, so reaching out to other people is really critical,” he says.

## **Maintain discipline by creating a routine.**

Jobs often provide our days and weeks with a sense of structure. When you lose a job, you often lose your schedule, says Robert Chope, professor emeritus at San Francisco State University, where he founded the career-counseling program. Dr. Chope says that when he and his wife first retired, every night felt like Friday night and every day felt like Saturday. Being unemployed is often the same, he says. “We have had to create routine in our life to allow us to individuate days and allow us to have some sense of succeeding,” Dr. Chope says. “When you lose the routine, you lose a lot of the orderliness of your life.”

Dr. Chope suggests incorporating regular exercise into your daily routine, as well as activities that help give you a sense of productivity, whether that means sending out a certain number of job applications a day or working on a new hobby. Setting yourself up for small wins can help you regain a sense of control over your life.

## **Be kind to yourself.**

Now isn't the time for negative self-talk, says Dr. Chope. Surround yourself with people who will make you feel good about yourself. If your situation has forced you to move back in with family members who are making you feel bad, you should try to remove yourself from the situation, Dr. Chope says. "You want to be around people who can help you see the opportunities around you with the skill sets you have so that you can move into something that is going to be new and different," he says.

It can be challenging to do this during a pandemic, but there are some strategies you can try. For example, if you are pursuing a career in the arts, and live with parents who aren't supportive of this choice, try reaching out to others in the field to see how they can help. "It is incredibly difficult now but there are many who are having the same experiences and may offer living arrangement ideas that are more conducive [to achieving your goals]," he says.

### **Tips**

Reach out to your network—whether it is friends, friends of friends or people who work in your industry—to find an alternative living arrangement.

If you can't leave home, try to create some space and physical distance for yourself.

Make time to connect, whether over the phone or video chat, with people who are supportive of you and your goals.

Consider seeing a mental-health professional or getting low-cost therapy.

It isn't uncommon to have feelings of depression and alienation after losing a job, says Dr. Blustein. At the same time, many people struggle to get by and provide for their families without a regular income, and some fear losing their homes. These issues can have a compounding effect. A study published in September 2019 by the

Association for Psychological Science found that people who experienced financial, housing-related or job-related hardship during the 2007-09 recession were more likely to show increased symptoms of depression, anxiety or substance abuse and had higher odds of a number of adverse mental health outcomes three years after the recession.

Mental-health professionals can help you develop coping mechanisms to navigate uncertain times. “Of course, the problem is, when people lose their jobs, they lose their health insurance, which reduces their access to health services,” Dr. Blustein says. If you are able, you should seek out low-cost therapy options to help you cope sooner rather than later. Dr. Blustein suggests contacting your primary-care doctor, if you have one, and asking him or her to help you get access to low-cost mental-health services in your area. You could also check out virtual therapy websites and apps like BetterHelp, which has offered some discounted therapy sessions during the coronavirus pandemic. The National Alliance on Mental Illness has also compiled a list of low-cost treatment options.

### **Try meditation.**

Mindfulness and meditation can help to reduce the symptoms of depression and anxiety, according to a study published in the journal *Frontiers in Psychology* in 2019. The meditation apps Calm and Headspace offer some free meditations and exercises. “Apps like that are really helpful because they offer both meditation, and good psycho-educational content,” says Dr. Blustein.

### **Seek out support groups to connect with others who are coping with job loss.**

You could join a virtual support group to find community. There are groups on social-media platforms such as Facebook and Reddit where users share tips and support. The unemployment-insurance-focused community on Reddit, for example, has more than 55,000 members.

### **Do something that is new, and unrelated to looking for a job.**

“It is important that people structure their days and fill their days with activities that won’t be as massively frustrating and humiliating as looking for a job,” says Dr. Blustein, who has worked with people who are long-term unemployed in his capacity as a psychologist.

Both he and Dr. Chope recommend volunteering. A 2015 study published in the Journal of Career Assessment, which looked at unemployed people between the ages of 21 and 29, found that those who volunteered for even an hour a week had a higher likelihood of becoming re-employed.

Volunteering can help give you a sense of purpose and accomplishment. It could also help you network with people in your community, some of whom may be able to help connect you with job opportunities. Engaging in activities that are important to you and help others can also foster a sense of confidence, says Dr. Chope.

### **Consider applying for unemployment insurance.**

If you have been laid off, you should consider applying for unemployment insurance. You could also take steps to cut your expenses as you look for work.

### **When you are ready to find a job, seek support in your search.**

You could reach out to friends and family, as well as alumni networks and former colleagues for help with your job search.

### **If you were laid off, take a comprehensive view.**

Many workers tend to blame themselves when they become unemployed, Dr. Blustein says. But there are often factors at play that the employee has no influence over. The coronavirus pandemic has hit many business sectors, including the live events, air travel and restaurant industries, which have slashed their spending. This has often led to furloughs or layoffs for workers. Tourism-dependent

economies, such as Hawaii and Las Vegas, have also suffered amid travel bans and worries about air travel.

Layoffs can happen at any time, regardless of the economic conditions, due to a range of factors affecting particular employers or industries, as part of cost-cutting exercises or strategic shifts. These often aren't a reflection on the work of the employees.

Dr. Blustein's research has shown that job seekers can benefit from taking a more comprehensive look at the reasons why it can be particularly difficult to find a job. For example, Black workers have much higher unemployment rates than white workers, no matter their education level, in part because of apparent discrimination, according to economists. If people can understand the ways they have been marginalized, Dr. Blustein says, they can stop blaming themselves for being unemployed. Instead they can focus on developing problem-solving skills and seeking out like-minded people for support. This can give people a sense of agency and direction when making changes in their lives and environments. "If we can help unemployed individuals take a more systemic, critical view of the causes of unemployment, not only is it more accurate, it will also allow people to organize together and have a beneficial impact on mental health," Dr. Blustein says.

### **Don't tie your self-worth to your work.**

Job loss can sometimes bring about feelings of shame but you should try to keep in mind that your self-worth isn't determined by your job title or the company you work for, says career coach Ms. Joyce. "Job loss isn't a personal attack, and we can't let it impact our self-confidence and our ability too much or tie our work to our worth," she says. "Your work isn't who you are, it is just what you do."

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