

The Path Forward

Redundant. Laid off. Terminated. These three mark a stark end to employment and for many, a change in a sense of self. Unfortunately, far too many people are hearing these ending words. Today's employment challenges will take many months, perhaps years, to work out. So what can we do now? Consider self-management the first and most important action step to the future.

Managing yourself through the steps needed to get back to work demands commitment, a daily commitment to doing something and to affirming yourself. It is too simple to give in to panic and too soon to simply give in. Particularly if you have identified yourself with your job, seizing control of your identity and choosing to move forward are hard. However, your future depends on you and on no one else.

Conclude each day by identifying the positive: At the end of each day, identify each positive step you've taken. What did you learn? Whom did you contact? What letters did you send? What meetings did you set up? Do something positive each day, and use it to remind yourself that you are moving forward. Keep a journal if that helps.

If you need support, seek it: No one wins when someone loses. Listening is a gift, and you know who will listen. Seek out those people and ask them to listen. If you need help starting, write it down and then reach out to someone, starting by sharing what you've written. If you're not used to seeking support, this can be a big step.

Conduct a self-assessment: Do you need to improve skills? Re-think your career? Change industry? Is it time to turn a passion into a job? Do you need to re-think your concept of "need to have" versus "want to have"? Identify what you need to build or create, define goals that are explicit, and work to meet them. If you set fuzzy goals, you will achieve fuzzy goals.

Seek professional advice: Coaches and career transition firms can help with skills assessments, resumes, interview skills, career concepts, and setting priorities. Even if money is tight, investing in yourself can often help produce a positive career transition and return value more quickly than self-help can. If money is very tight, seek free resources. Investigate what your church or other community centers offer. Explore the internet. Trade services.

Seek personal advice and connections: Reach out. Networking is critical: Map and then contact everyone you know and everyone they know and everyone they know. Go beyond networking and recognize that you can help other people network, and they can help you re-define yourself. Friends show up at times like these. Friends remind you that you are valuable because of who you are, not because of what you do or what you earn. Connect with real people and with your community.

Give back: It might be counter-intuitive, but the sooner you begin to give back to other people and to your community, the more likely you'll find yourself and a new direction. The more challenging the times, the more it's time to give.

Be prepared; Be open: In tough times, friends might be afraid to listen and might not know how to help. They are friends, and you need to keep reaching out, too. People you barely know will stretch to help. People have yet to meet will turn out to be new friends and supporters. Focus on opening yourself to new people and opportunities.