

Reeling From a Sudden Job Loss? Here's How to Start Healing.

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Summary. Sudden job loss can occur when you're terminated or laid off, when you resign because you feel you have no choice, when you're moved to a different role within your organization, or when you're burned out and choose to leave. Regardless of the reason,... [more](#)

Mike had been a successful executive for more than 20 years, turning troubled departments into efficient and quality-driven business lines. When a new leadership team took over the

organization, he witnessed a shift in vision and an abundance of deceit, distrust, and betrayal. Mike spoke out against cost-cutting initiatives that compromised safety and quality standards until he was told his services were no longer needed.

Unfortunately, Mike's experience is far from unique. Sudden job loss can occur when you're terminated or laid off, when you resign because you feel you have no choice (for example, you observe ethical violations in your organization that you don't want to be a part of), when you're moved to a different role within your organization, or when you're burned out and choose to leave.

Regardless of the reason, the sudden loss of a job can be nothing short of traumatic. Mike worked hard to be successful, and he'd devoted decades of his career to this organization. His grief was gut-wrenching, leaving him to deal with feelings of anger, betrayal, isolation, shame, and hopelessness.

Those emotions can feel intense, unwieldy, and even unmanageable, especially when you've attained a certain position or income level, bear the financial responsibility of a household, or when work has become an intrinsic marker of your moral worth. You may also notice that the forced transition disrupts your routines, triggers unhealthy coping habits, and places significant strain on the relationship with your partner.

Amid the anguish, it's critical that you reach out for help so that you can regain your mental clarity and ability to take healthy, productive next steps. Consider these tips to help you stay whole through this process, reconnect to your purpose, and most importantly, heal.

Practice self-compassion.

You may feel a sense of shame or guilt if you focus on taking care of yourself after a sudden job loss. You may be beating yourself up and wondering, "What did I do to deserve this? What could I have

done to prevent it?” But now is the time, like no other, to practice self-compassion.

First, recognize that this is one of the toughest times in your life, so you need to be extra gentle on yourself. Then, double down on reconnecting with people you love outside of work — spend quality time with them to brighten your mood, alleviate tension, and contribute to your sense of connection to others. Allow yourself to be vulnerable by courageously sharing your feelings with others and accepting their help and support.

Attend to your unmet needs.

According to David Rock’s SCARF model, losing a job — regardless of the reason — violates all five human social dimensions: our sense of **s**tatus (our relative importance to others), **c**ertainty (ability to predict the future), **a**utonomy (feeling of control over events), **r**elatedness (safety with others), and **f**airness (justice).

For many people, losing a job is one of the most stressful and painful events they’ve experienced. If this sounds like you, don’t minimize how you feel. Give yourself permission to grieve, as well as enough time to think about what you need to heal. Focus on making yourself whole again in body and mind.

Start by keeping a journal outlining what you feel you’ve lost and what you need to move forward. Then, add a list of people and experiences you’re thankful for or are looking forward to. This will help you shift your mental focus from loss and uncertainty to control and forward momentum.

Focus on what you can control.

Use your emotional intelligence to regulate an over- or underreaction to your present conditions and to focus on what you can control. Seeking an explanation for why it happened to you is counterproductive, because it keeps you anchored in the past and undermines forward momentum.

Acknowledge your brutal reality while maintaining a level of optimism and an understanding that, eventually, you will make it through. This puts you in problem-solving mode as opposed to emotional self-control mode. This is key to letting go and moving on.

Take small steps at first by doing something that uses your skills and abilities, like volunteering for an organization you care about. It will help you regain your confidence, contribute to your sense of meaningful work, and reduce your stress level.

Accept what you can't control and prepare to move on.

Even though you didn't ask for it, try to embrace this change and learn from it. Don't become your own obstacle by instinctively resisting new possibilities or opportunities. Instead, take this opportunity to self-reflect on the positive lessons you learned from the job you just lost.

This will prove invaluable during your next job interviews. It's a challenge to put on a happy face for a recruiter or hiring manager while you're grieving your old job and fearing rejection once again. While you cannot control the outcome of an interview, you can use the lessons from your last job as a motivator to develop strong answers for your next interview. This will improve your self-confidence, which will be reflected in your body language.

Shift your perspective and stay open minded.

Focusing on the possibilities of the future and a vision of your ideal self will gradually shift your emotional response from grief and loss to feelings of composure, control, and confidence. Recognize that shifting from shock and grief to the hope of new possibilities takes time, effort, and intention. Use the forced transition as a gift.

As you move forward and begin to explore new work opportunities, stay open to taking an "in-between" job — perhaps with a decrease in pay if you can swing it, or one that's not in your

desired field — and treat it as an opportunity for growth rather than seeing it as a setback or a failure. While sudden job loss marks an undeniably painful and stressful season in your career, you can use the time to reset, recenter, and redefine how you want to live your life so that your work ultimately reflects who you are, and not the other way around.

It's easy to forget that you're filling a role in an organization and that your job doesn't define you. This is especially true when you're always on and never quite leave work. When you can separate your work from your purpose, you'll find that a job is just a job, and that your purpose lives in you, and just like you, it adapts, changes, and matures over time. As Umair Haque has written: "Purpose is a process, not a state; an ever-unfinished accomplishment, not an algorithm." Take time to consider not just what you want to do next, but also who you want to serve with your work.

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Mike used the time after his sudden job loss to reevaluate what he really stood for in life, who he wanted to serve, and how he saw his career aligning with his purpose. He'd long dreamed of teaching and found an adjunct position with a local university. It came with a decrease in salary, but an undeniable increase in his sense of wholeness. A year later, when a full-time position became available, Mike went for it. Three years after that, he was named professor of the year.

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