Economic Uncertainty Toolkit

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Layoffs in the Workplace

A Guide for Managers

1.800.451.1834
HANDLING LAYOFFS
Basics for Managers

• Notify first the people most affected by the layoffs.

• Remember that the method and manner in which layoffs are made has a direct impact upon how the individual who is being laid off will accept the decision and move beyond it.

• Communicate frequently with your work group. Give as much information regarding the situation as possible. Assume that inaccurate information is going around, which heightens stress. Thoughtfully plan your response to this.

• Confirm that the information you give regarding layoffs is correctly heard. Remember: people under stress do not listen well, and have a decreased ability to remember. Ask for feedback about what you have communicated, in order to make sure that it has been understood. Repeat your communication. Do not assume that it was heard or understood the first time.

• Think about how you would like to be treated if you were in the situation of an employee facing a layoff. Doing so will help you anticipate and prepare for the accompanying emotions.

• Be extra vigilant after you issue layoff notices. Watch for actions that may indicate someone may hurt himself/herself or others. Do not take chances if you have concerns: contact Human Resources and your Employee Assistance Program.

• Keep all employees informed on a continuing, regular basis about budgets and their impact on the company’s services and work force.

• When appropriate, encourage remaining employees to contribute to decision making, to instill a sense of control (e.g., brainstorming sessions in your department or planning distribution of work). This may seem like business as usual, but will help to maintain a higher level of employee commitment.

Adapted from information on the Iowa Department of Personnel website.

1.800.451.1834
• Be alert to the behaviors and moods of employees who have been left behind after a layoff. They are feeling stressed, may be angry or sad, and may be seeking ways to release these emotions. Be aware of this, and do not respond by becoming angry yourself.

• Rely on your Human Resources department. Human Resource professionals are skilled at guiding you through this process, including how best to talk to employees about layoffs, organizing informational sessions regarding benefits and unemployment, and helping to arrange outplacement assistance.

• Encourage employees to ask questions. If you do not have the answers, let them know what you are doing to find information. It is important to let employees be heard, and to believe what they say matters.

• Be available for questions and to offer support. This is important in times of stress and change.

• To limit the negative impact on morale that might occur, keep in mind that employees who have not been laid off may feel “survivor’s guilt”.

• Maintain business as usual as much as possible. Routines reduce stress.

• Pay attention to your own emotional reaction to layoffs. Watch and take care of your own stress level.

• Keep in mind that employees who remain with the company may also display stress-related behavior because of anxiety about the future.

• Call on the EAP for support, and inform employees about EAP services.
Career counselors and mental health professionals all agree: losing a job can be as traumatic as other major losses in life. Recovery is a process that takes time. Here are some points to support a healthier recovery:

- Through the process of termination, employees typically experience a roller coaster of emotions. Whether the layoff is welcomed or unwelcomed by the employee, there are many accompanying feelings that occur, including relief, fear, frustration, grief, anger, and helplessness. As employees get used to the idea of losing their job, emotions can change quickly depending on individual circumstances. This range of emotions is normal.

- Employees have different reactions to job loss, and may use free time in various ways. According to Charles Prugh, an outplacement and career consultant, many employees use a layoff to engage in personal self-exploration regarding future career choices. Some people decide after a layoff to start their own business, or to clarify what matters most to them in a future career. Others attempt to move as quickly as possible to the next position, driven by financial or professional reasons.

- As with other losses, employees go through a grief process that includes denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Once people have experienced a release of anger, frustration, and fear, and are moving toward acceptance, they begin to explore different career options. This may be done through networking, informational interviewing, career fairs, and other resources.

- The length of time for this grief and recovery process varies from individual to individual. Support and resources are available through the Employee Assistance Program as employees weigh decisions, make new life changes, and seek new opportunities.

Adapted from the “Unemployment Survival Handbook”
Staying healthy means using your personal resources most effectively. Try the following suggestions:

• Get regular physical exercise, alternated with relaxation; this will reduce the stress your body is carrying.
• Structure your time - keep busy!
• Talk to people. Talking helps in times of uncertainty by providing an outlet and perspective.
• Avoid overusing alcohol or other drugs that block your ability to express yourself and adapt to change.
• Maintain as normal a schedule as possible. Use your free time constructively and positively.
• Spend some time alone as necessary, and remember it is also important to spend time with others and allow people to take care of you.
• Sometimes it helps to just let yourself feel broken for awhile.
• Keep a journal. Write your way through sleepless hours.
• Do things that feel good and will make you feel good about yourself.
• Develop an inventory of your skills and their related applications.
• Try to make as many daily decisions as you can, which will give you a feeling of control over your life. Keep a list of things to do, and check them off as they are completed.
• Get plenty of rest.
• Eat well-balanced and regular meals (even if you don’t feel like it).
You may experience a host of emotions following the sudden downsizing of your colleagues at work. After all, your job has been spared while others have lost theirs.

- You may experience fear that this might not be the end of the cuts, and that you may be next to lose your job.

- You may feel survivor’s guilt – “Why did Joe lose his job and not me? He is an excellent worker!”

- You may have empathy for the plight of those who have lost their jobs.

- You may feel a sense of relief that the downsizing is over, and joy that you still have your job.

- You may feel anger directed toward your employer or, more generally, toward the state of the economy.

- You may grieve the loss of your coworkers/friends and want to reach out to them in some way to comfort them.

- You may have feelings of helplessness, depression and vulnerability.

- You may want to commiserate with your former coworkers, keeping communication going beyond the brief good-bye on the day of their termination.

It is normal for you to have these feelings. Allow yourself to experience them in your own time.
The markets have been greatly fluctuating. The news reports are disconcerting. There are many questions about the bail-out plan on Capitol Hill. No matter the circumstances, for most individuals, the topic of money can generate stress. In uncertain economic times, feelings of fear, panic or anxiety are not uncommon. While the situation locally, on Wall Street, and in Washington, DC, may not be in our control, there are many things we can do to cope effectively with stress and financial uncertainty. The following is a list of suggestions:

- **Talk With Others**
  Share your feelings with family, friends, and colleagues with whom you feel comfortable.

- **Moderate Your Exposure to the Media**
  Continuous media coverage of the financial crisis can feel overwhelming. Be aware of your reactions and decide when to turn off the TV or switch to less intense programming.

- **Maintain Perspective**
  Distinguish between what has actually happened and what might happen. Keep your concerns in proportion to the actual situation. Avoid catastrophic thinking.

- **Practice Positive “Self-Talk”**
  When you have negative thoughts, challenge the logic of those thoughts. Replace negative thoughts with positive thoughts.

- **Prioritize**
  Clarify your concerns. Identify what you have control over and what you do not. Act on what you have control over.

- **Limit Major Life Decisions**
  The more changes and challenges in our lives, the greater the stress level. If you have any influence over the timing of upcoming changes, you might consider delaying some of them. Best-made decisions are not made uncertainly. Delay major decisions until more certain times.

- **Use Humor**
  Remember to laugh. Humor can provide relief even during the most stressful times.

- **Remember the Basics: Nutrition, Rest, and Exercise**
  Eat a balanced diet. Sleep eight hours at night. Exercise regularly; walking and other physical activities will help. Keeping yourself healthy is the best way to stay resilient.

If your reaction to current financial events is interfering with daily activities, or if you would simply like to talk with a counselor about everyday stress, call your Employee Assistance Program. We can provide financial resources and confidential services, at no charge to employees and dependents. Licensed clinicians are available 24/7 for crisis intervention and support.
A financial plan is vital to financial health. The following tips will help you manage household finances in uncertain times.

1. Take Inventory
   List what you spend now and identify expenses that can be reduced or eliminated. See how much you can save.

2. Set aside Money for Savings and Emergencies
   Regularly deposit money in a savings account. Financial planners recommend that you set aside enough money for three months of bills.

3. Reduce and Limit Debt
   Stop using credit cards. Buy only what you can afford.

4. Prioritize Spending
   Distinguish items you need now from those items that can wait. Prioritize spending and saving efforts. Some larger ticket items, like vacations, require thoughtful planning over time.

5. Involve the Entire Household
   To be successful, all family members need to be involved in the financial plan. Children, too, can contribute to savings and set financial goals.

6. Include Fun and Relaxation
   Fun and relaxation are essential to the overall success of a financial plan. If monies are limited, be creative about ways to enjoy yourself on a limited budget or for free.

7. Review and Evaluate
   Review financial plans regularly. Be flexible and reprioritize as needed. The goal is to develop life long habits of smart spending and saving. Consult with a financial professional as needed.

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On 10/6/08, the Dow Jones Industrial plummeted more than 800 points. Now, many people are losing money daily, facing potential job losses, feeling heightened anxiety over the loss of security, and wondering how they will manage their finances. This kind of shake up can be an invitation to deep pain, rich exploration, and hopeful transformation. An important thing for us to remember is that it is the grit in the oyster’s shell that results in the creation of a pearl. We have all experienced the grit. Our daily challenge is to transform that grit and consciously cultivate pearls in our lives.

The EAP offers facilitated discussions designed to help participants remember to stay connected to people, relationships, and activities that matter most in their lives. This fundamental connection is critical to navigating our way through the pain and possibility, and creating hope during these vulnerable times. The discussion will consist of didactic moments, an exercise to elicit relaxation, and a personal resiliency plan for going forward.

Contact your EAP Consultant to see if this training is available in your area.
Everyone experiences excess stress from time to time. Chronic stress, however, takes a toll on our physical health, our sense of well-being, and our relationships.

In this program, participants will learn the physical and psychological consequences of chronic stress, will understand how to recognize stress before it becomes a problem, and will practice specific stress reduction techniques that may be applied at work and at home.

The following will be addressed:

- Behavioral and lifestyle approaches
- Cognitive strategies- how to think away stress
- Relaxation techniques- attendees will participate in a relaxation exercise

Contact your EAP Consultant to see if this training is available in your area.