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Left behind after the layoffs

Associated Press

Published Sunday, January 11, 2009

Guilt.

Worry.

Betrayal.

Confusion.

You're supposed to be one of the lucky ones. You survived your company's recent round of downsizing. Then why do you feel sad, angry and scared? Here's how to cope when co-workers lose their jobs. *Associated Press*

Ask about your future with the company

Survivors feel a heightened anxiety because of an increased workload, change in duties and the possibility they could be let go, career experts say. There's nothing wrong with asking questions, says Michael Barr of the Chicago School of Professional Psychology: Am I on the list? How would I know? Would I get severance? Is the information in that newspaper article correct? "If your company is doing town hall meetings, attend, and bring questions with you," says Barr. But be prepared: People may not have the answers. If communication is not handled well, ask yourself, what your options are. Most likely, you want to continue performing well, even if you want to leave the organization.

Work on managing "ghost work"

Ask your supervisor to give you job descriptions of laid-off co-workers whose responsibilities you are now expected to shoulder, says Paul Facella, author of *Everything I Know about Business I Learned at McDonald's*. Then set up a meeting to review the new tasks, he says. He says this will help you prioritize and your boss will be aware of and accountable for an excess workload. If you are taking on new job duties, ask if you will get training, Barr says. Sometimes the ones who are let go are the only ones who know how to do a task. Don't kill yourself, Facella says. You are no good to the company if your workload starts to take a toll on your mental and physical health.

Show the boss you're not expendable

Do work that matters, says Stuart Sidle, director of Industrial-Organizational Psychology Graduate Program at University of New Haven in West Haven, Conn. Writing reports that no one reads is a warning sign you may be in the next round, he says. "To reduce this risk of irrelevancy, become an expert on organizational tasks that are crucial that most people are too lazy to learn," Sidle says. Facella suggests coming up with three to five areas where former employees' tasks were inefficient and presenting a plan to streamline the processes. He also advises submitting a report of cost-cutting proposals. Try to maintain a positive attitude. Take on new tasks cheerfully and work to be a top performer.

Start looking for another job — now

Layoffs are a warning sign that more may be coming, says Sidle. Make sure you are networking. Relationships outside of the office are sometimes more critical than the actual work, says Marjorie Brody, CEO of Brody Professional Development in Jenkintown, Pa. Most people find opportunities through connections as opposed to resumes on career sites, says Facella. If you wish you had been laid off — you wanted the early retirement — talk to someone in HR, says Barr, but emphasize you are committed to the organization. Think about what you would be doing if you were retired and see if you can start doing those things now.

Take care of yourself

Make sure you are exercising and eating right, says Sidle. Exercise can be an antidepressant and stress reliever. Lean on your support system, says Barr. Focus on things outside of work that you like to do. Seek help if your anxiety manifests into physical symptoms, such as a change in sleeping and eating patterns, says Barr.

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