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JOB LOSS

Fear of Trying

Your new job is starting. You survived the long, difficult process, the sea of emotions, and personal difficulties, perhaps struggled through retraining. And nothing at the new job could be worse than unemployment, right? Landing new employment can be anything from a lucky break toward a new career, to a temporary survival job. Regardless, the transition can be troubling because of the many unknowns and few of us thrive on the unknown.

Some of our reactions to a new job opportunity may surprise us. Torn between what she used to do and a career change she wanted to make, Margaret says, “For every resume I threw out [that matched her old job] I thought, I hope they don’t call me.” While the job loss may have been months ago, we may still carry emotional baggage. George, an employment program manager says anger, resentment, remorse and sorrow may simmer for months, even years after job loss and employers can become impatient with new hires that seem still attached to their old job. The simple observation, “At ABC Manufacturing we did things differently,” may stir animosity.

Here are some common feelings experienced by new hires:

- **Outsider**
Shared distrust with new peers
- **Uncertainty**
Lacking confidence.
- **Self-isolation**
Reluctant to request help
- **Pressured**
Urgency to prove yourself
- **Fear**
Will this job last?

In addition, we may still be emotionally fragile, sensitive and easily angered. A new job results in a change of status with peers at work. You still need some time to build the kinds of relationships and trust you had before, so feeling a little like a stranger is quite natural.

The job loss experience batters self-esteem. This may show up as apprehension, risk aversion, impaired creativity, and doubt—all of which dampen performance.

Tom returned to school in his mid-30s and recalls the agony of submitting his first assignment. Hesitantly, he included a hand-written note to apologize for its deficiencies. The instructor’s response became a personal turning point, “This is fine, it’s a B, keep going.”

After an arduous job search and the initial relief of finding a new job, self-confidence should soar, but many people need time to feel secure again. “Even though I found a job quickly in the same field, today more than ten years after I lost my job, I still doubt my abilities and hesitate when I should grasp opportunities,” says Sara.

The dynamics and emotions for a new hire can be similar to those experienced in blending families. On one level, peers may be welcoming, while on another, suspicious and resentful of anticipated changes. Well-intended suggestions may be mistaken for criticism; comparing what worked at the old job and what may seem to need fixing at the new one may bring animosity not praise. New ideas are more readily accepted from those we know, so new hires need patience to develop relationships in a new workplace.

The broader implications of serial job loss on workforce production overall raise concern with the current trend to part-time, contract and outsourcing of work. George, an employment counsellor, suggests during the transition from job loss to re-employment it is, “critical to keep looking at yourself, do some reflection on the experience. What did you learn? Be prepared for the next time.”

Many displaced workers are in the mid-life. Not only unprepared for career change, they may lack education, be in the middle of marriage transition, have kids starting university, be ill, or experiencing all these at once. Answering yes to ‘Are

you getting by?’ is not a valid measure of re-employment success, says George. “Unemployment is not just a numbers problem, it’s a soul problem—it damages people’s souls, their family’s souls and the community’s soul.”

Counsellors contacted for this series agree on one thing. Those who best transition to re-employment are individuals who have been able to put their work into a satisfying life perspective? Viewing job loss as a chance for self-discovery and reassessment of values can make all the difference shortening the time needed for recovery.

Signs You Are Okay

- Sense of joy
- Regained feelings of control
- Heightened sensory awareness
- Rekindled trust
- Sensitivity to needs of others
- Reappearance of curiosity
- Return to playfulness
- Resurgence of creativity
- Restoration of resilience and flexibility

Names have been changed to protect the privacy of the interviewees.

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