

Rightsized, Downsized, Fired: How to Turn a Disaster into a Career Success

It is 3:30 PM Friday afternoon. You have just been informed by your Group Vice President that you are being let go from your position as (you fill in the blank). You were asked to go to Human Resources to receive an explanation of your benefits. The half hour meeting with the HR Representative passed in a blur. You said goodbye to the rest of the team, packed your belongings and left under the watchful eyes of the company's Security Director.

All that goes through your mind on your drive home is: what will you tell your family? You think of the new house you just purchased, the amount you just paid for braces for your teenager and the amount of money you owe on household bills. You worry about paying the bills and try to remember the severance package the HR Representative reviewed with you.

Finally you reach home and as each family member arrives, you tell them the terrible news. You have to deal with their anger and fear as well as your own over the weekend.

You try to work on your resume but between calls and visits from well-meaning friends and family, you can't seem to focus on writing the resume.

Finally, it is Monday morning and unlike the others in your household, you have no where to go. What you do the first week after notification of the end of your employment will determine your success in moving swiftly and successfully to your next career opportunity.

What Not To Do

1. Don't send out your resume and don't start making networking calls. Why not? Most individuals who have been terminated go into a flurry of activity in the first week. They start sending resumes and making calls without thinking about what they are looking for, what they have to offer, planning their networking strategy or planning what they are going to say. They don't even think about and plan for having to answer the question: "Why did you leave your last employer?"
2. Don't contact your former colleagues to find out who else was terminated, who is going to be doing your work, what's happening with the ABC Project? Don't spend time with former colleagues playing the "Ain't it awful" game.
3. Don't start calling search firms asking if they have any openings. Search firms and even most contingency recruiters work for the employers, not for you.

What Should You Do?

1. Slow down. Spend the time considering and writing your career assets, your career options and your short- and long-term career goals. Then write your value proposition.

2. Plan your networking strategy. Decide who you will contact, what you will say, think about how you can help them, then identify their issues, needs and concerns.
3. Write a resume that proves your value and emphasizes accomplishments and results.
4. Consider other alternatives. Do you really want to work for another corporate entity or do you want to start a business, join a non-profit, investigate a whole new career field, work from home, etc.?

Taking the time to plan your strategy and implementing it flawlessly will save you from making costly mistakes and will benefit you in being perceived as organized and purposeful in your job search.

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