



ADJUSTING TO A LAYOFF

Sam Bakou, CFP®

Unemployment rates jumped from 4.9% to 7.2% during 2008. Workers in every area of the country were affected; few industries were spared. Almost 3 million non-farm payrolls were lost. As of January 2009 the unemployment rate increased to 7.6%. If you're among the many who lost a job, or if your employer is currently considering downsizing, we offer these helpful tips.

FILE FOR UNEMPLOYMENT

Applications can take several weeks to process. Don't procrastinate! Benefits vary according to your state residency and income when last employed. Visit www.CareerOneStop.org for details explaining your state's specific plan.

SOLICIT PROFESSIONAL HELP

Consider utilizing a career coach or a placement agency to critique your resume and evaluate your interview skills, especially if you've not interviewed for many years. Try to negotiate the terms with your employer and ask that he/she cover the cost of retaining such a professional.

NETWORK, NETWORK, NETWORK!

Over 60% of new jobs are achieved through network connections – a staggering number! Tell everyone you know you are unemployed and looking for a new endeavor. Establish a professional online presence through network sites like www.LinkedIn.com (you can omit personal details). Visit career fairs and networking groups that meet in your area. Attend seminars and conferences in your field where you can catch up with old acquaintances and make new contacts. Share business cards with people you meet there; www.VistaPrint.com will supply a limited number without charge.

ENHANCE YOUR SKILLS

Seminars and conferences can help keep your current work skills up-to-date. It is also good to pursue consulting or temporary work assignments in order to learn and retain new skills. Use free time wisely to better yourself personally and professionally through volunteering, and/or pursuing academic goals.



CONSIDER A CAREER CHANGE

A layoff can happen to even the best, most highly valued employee. When confidently taken in stride, it can also become a blessing in disguise. Recognize a layoff as an opportunity to make a significant career change, or start the business you've always dreamed of owning. Firms like the Johnson O'Connor Research Foundation (www.jocrf.org) can help you identify innate aptitudes and personal strengths that, in turn, can be helpful in directing you toward a good fit in the workplace.

DEDUCT JOB SEARCH COSTS

Investigate expenses such as outplacement agency fees, travel expenses, phone expenses

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and resume preparation costs to see if they qualify as tax deductions. These expenses may be categorized as “miscellaneous deductions” that apply only if you itemize deductions, and if they exceed 2% of your adjusted gross income.

YOUR NEW JOB DESCRIPTION

Don't be tempted to rely solely on a head-hunter to find you a new job. Assume responsibility for your future, knowing many available opportunities will emerge only as the result of expending your own time and effort. Be structured - looking for a job IS your new full time job! Establish an area of your home as your office and designate a certain number of hours per day to search.

HEALTH INSURANCE

You will have the option to continue your previous coverage through COBRA. This option might be ideal if you are not covered by your spouses' insurance since there are no restrictions on pre-existing conditions. However, COBRA can be costly since you are responsible for the portion your employer previously paid. If you are healthy and can qualify for an individual plan, consider a private policy to minimize monthly costs.

TRADITIONAL IRA VS. ROTH

Perhaps you've been off work for most of the year and have earned minimal income. You may consider converting a portion of your traditional IRA into a Roth. This would trigger a tax liability, but it might be based on a lower tax

bracket. Don't forget to consider any income restrictions which may apply.

EVALUATE 401K VS. AN IRA

You may opt to roll over your 401(k) balance into a self-directed IRA. Rather than being restricted to the fund choices of your plan, an IRA can offer a wide array of investments. Assets being rolled over to an IRA must be made payable to your IRA Trustee or Custodian rather than you, individually, in order to avoid a mandatory 20% Federal tax withholding.

If you are unemployed, know that you are not alone! Consult with your Vantage Relationship Manager or Tax Advisor to better understand the financial aspects of a layoff. Enlist the help of friends and family; widen your horizons by becoming involved with others; establish normal hours of operation to network, research and volunteer. Most importantly, maintain an optimistic outlook, confident attitude, and strong work ethic as you pave the way toward a new position in the workforce. 

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VANTAGE NEWS

Abundant economic challenges have confronted many people in recent months. However, it is good to remember times like these can also provide opportunities for people to focus on priorities - things like faith, family, and values - and respond to opportunities to serve and/or be served.

Tom Vislisl is an example of those who enjoy participating in events orchestrated specifically to help others. Tom, an active leader and member of his church's stewardship ministry, was blessed to participate in the Hope and Help Conference held at his church, Harvest Bible Chapel.

Michael Rohrwasser occasionally serves in a non-profit organization, Palatine Assisting Through Hope (P.A.T.H.), where his wife, Debbie, is a director. They recognize our current economy can present many difficulties for individuals and families in crisis situations.

Kim Taylor as well as her son, Josh, and daughter, Niki, enjoy serving at the Willow Creek Food Pantry once a month. They always leave with a sense of gratitude for having had an opportunity to serve others' basic needs.

It is always heartening to observe generous, caring people working together to give and receive during difficult times.