

Reinvent Yourself After Job Loss: Ten Tips so You Don't Skip A Beat!

By Faith Monson

Today's economy is creating uncertainty—and opportunity—for a record number of American professionals. As companies downsize, millions of people are planning Act II of their lives. If you're one of them, you know what it feels like to be outside of your comfort zone. Resist the temptation to sink into despair. This “slow period” can be an opportunity to rethink your long-term goals, readjust your priorities, reassess what's needed to accomplish your vision and reframe your skills to attract a new employer. You can use this transition to emerge stronger than ever—if you use your energy to create a game plan to reach your goals.

Here's your survival kit to help you make the most of your new possibilities without skipping a beat.

Create an “I Believe In Me—and So Do Others” bulletin board. This is a combination of a vision board (where you post pictures of your goals and dreams) and a collection of the inspirational quotes, congratulatory emails, thank you notes and testimonials others send praising your best qualities. Make sure you put this bulletin board where you'll see it frequently from your workspace to keep your spirits high.

Make a “greatest achievements” folder. List your awards and promotions and quantify your successes. Don't worry whether they're big or small, personal or professional. Include things like volunteer service and workplace committees, leadership roles, events you've hosted, big sales and new clients that you've landed. Keep this close at hand so you can refocus on your successes the next time you're feeling down.

Do a “skills inventory” and ask your friends to help. Make a list of all the skills, traits and talents you think are valuable at work and in leadership roles. Now ask a few close friends, trusted colleagues and even supportive family members to do the same. This informal “360 review” is likely to turn up strong points from others that you discount in yourself. Keep these skills and talents in mind as you prepare to find a new role, and continue to ask your group of supporters for feedback throughout the process, and use them to help you role play for practice before important interviews and presentations.

Stay in the business habit. Dress the part when you go out for lunches or coffee with friends and colleagues. If funds permit, buy a new suit (or at least a fresh tie or scarf) or invest in a new briefcase, folio or purse. You'll feel fresh and confident. Make sure your shoes are shined, your clothes are pressed and that you have the best haircut you can afford. Limit the people to whom you confide your fears, personal issues and uncertainties to a trusted few who can be counted on to respect your confidences.

Realize that you are your own product. Get personal business cards made so you have a professional calling card. Try to avoid self-printed perforated cards and take advantages of the many online specials for a quality product at a great price. Buy a

domain name that's as close to your name as possible and get a professional email address that isn't AOL, Hotmail, Gmail or one of the other free services. Remember, you're building a brand—YOU!

Surround yourself with positives. Read proactive, affirming business books. Hang out with positive people. Look for mentors who can help you make new connections or develop new skills. Thank people for their help, and look for ways that you can help others by making connections or sharing your expertise. Don't dwell on your fears. Reframe negative, fearful thoughts as challenges and opportunities. Even better, set goals for yourself and reward every achievement.

Continue to grow. Find a mentor. If your finances won't permit you to hire a mentor, see if you can barter services or take advantage of some of the free business resources from the Small Business Authority, Chamber of Commerce and local universities and community colleges. Read books that help you broaden your business perspective. Take courses, sign up for workshops and attend lectures. Go to trade shows, networking opportunities and business receptions where you can meet new people. Use the Internet for competitive research. Make the most of your flexible schedule to stay current and connected.

Take time for yourself. This transition is a unique opportunity. Take some “mental health breaks” and schedule in time for workouts, lunches with encouraging friends or family, even trips to the park. You'll be back at work soon enough and back on the career treadmill. Plan a half day every week to do something relaxing like enjoy a walk, read at the library, go to a free afternoon at the museum or have a picnic. You'll be amazed at how refreshed you'll feel without spending a dime.

Congratulate yourself for the wins, both big and small. Don't wait until you find a job to celebrate. Reward yourself when you make ten phone calls or send ten emails. Praise yourself for the effort when you schedule appointments or research a potential employer. Make a do-able daily to-do list and celebrate reaching the end of every day's list. Celebrate your win when you create your web site, refresh your resume or polish your cover letter. Make sure to share your successes with supportive friends.

Make your success visible—and visual. Professionals in the creative industries know how important a portfolio is to showcase their best work for a prospective client. Why not borrow the idea even if you're not in a “creative” profession? Create an online multimedia portfolio with photos or graphics to represent key milestones or accomplishments in your resume.

Ask for audio or emailed endorsements from former bosses and colleagues, even people who have seen your volunteer contributions. Upload photos of your involvement in community projects such as Habitat for Humanity. (Hint: Your LinkedIn page could be a great place for this!) Or, create an off-line “portfolio” of your work contrasting “before” and “after” examples of your work in text descriptions or photos (if appropriate). Use a

three-ring binder so you can add or change content to suit the interview. Be sure to include your resume and reference letters.

Many successful people look back on times when they were “displaced” and realize in hindsight that those transitions were amazing growth opportunities. While change is never easy, your attitude, persistence and actions can enable you to realize your dreams. So don’t let a career change slow you down. It just might be the opportunity you’ve been searching for!

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