

*Been told to pack up and leave? Losing a job isn't just about pay. Its impact can lead to stress, high blood pressure, and even depression. Sarah Gawthorne reports.*

**I** remember listening to radio reports last September when 5,000 employees, from overseas investment bank giant Lehman Brothers, lost their jobs. The journalist described the scene as hundreds of people from the UK division drifted past her with boxes containing what was left of their positions. They'd come to work that morning as normal, but were leaving confused, shocked, uncertain and unemployed. I didn't even know these people, but, as I listened, I cried.

It was one of the first moments we all started to realise the extent of the current financial crisis. Before long, the job losses hit Australia. I feared for friends who worked in finance, quietly thanking the fact I hadn't gone into that industry. But, two months later – with a similar shock and hastily packed box – it wasn't just them who'd lost their job, it was me, too.

**“Some people will overeat or undereat.”**

Since then, the economic meltdown has gotten worse. Hearing about mass redundancies on the radio no longer shocks me. And many expect the overall unemployment numbers to continue to rise throughout 2009.

## **LOSING YOUR JOB**

Losing your job is considered one of the most stressful situations you can face in life. Obviously, a sudden lack of income when you have bills or rent to pay is a scary prospect, but that's not where the real emotion and stress emanate from. “The result, in many ways, is the same if you're retrenched or fired because it's about the sense of loss of who you are,” says Mark Burnicle, director of outplacement

# Losing



# it: Why becoming unemployed can affect more than your bank balance

service PeopleNet. "Much of the stress comes from the fact we all want to be valued and, when we lose a role, it's a sense that we're no longer valued. That's something money can't buy."

People who do talk about how they're feeling – and many will probably choose to gloss over it with friends and family – often say it's like a rollercoaster. In fact, there are a number of emotional stages that people can go through: shock, denial, anger, fear, grief, frustration, risk-taking, optimism, managing stress, planning and creating a vision.

"Much like any life-changing moment of loss, everyone moves through these stages, albeit at a very individual pace," says Burnicle.

## PHYSICAL IMPACT

It's not just your bank balance that job losses affect. "Some people will overeat or undereat, due to stress during this period," says Burnicle. "They often have headaches or nausea, anxiety attacks, high blood pressure and even stress-related side effects like hair loss. In severe situations, people will experience depression."

Stress can trigger so many varying physical responses. It's not uncommon for someone who's in a highly stressed or depressed state to lose their desire to want to go out, eat, or do things that usually make them happy.

## GETTING SUPPORT

If you've just been let go at work, "give yourself time to grieve and identify what you've lost," says Burnicle. Then, when you start to feel an improvement, think about what your next career move will be. Who knows? This could be the beginning of a great new chapter for you.

If it's happened to a loved one, it can be just as exhausting and confusing. "It's very difficult because you have a strong desire to help and, yet, have no control over the situation," explains Burnicle. "It's not uncommon to have people not tell their family or partners for months rather than upset them with the news."

"It's important, just like any other life-changing loss, that you're empathetic, encouraging and positive where appropriate, and, more than anything, that you listen," he adds. "Most people aren't looking for you to solve their problems; they just want someone to listen, which helps them fix it themselves."

## WHAT NOT TO SAY TO SOMEONE WHO'S JUST LOST THEIR JOB:

- ✗ Don't try to apply logic. Comments like, "Don't worry, just get a new one", are upsetting and make people's emotional anguish feel misunderstood.
- ✗ While sending them job ads is helpful, if they aren't ready for it, they may take it as a sign you feel they're not trying hard enough.
- ✗ Telling a friend to "Stop whingeing and get a new job", or saying "All we hear is you can't come out because you don't have any money", is a sure-fire way to strain your relationship, says Burnicle. It's not uncommon for people to admit they truly found out who their friends were when they lost their job.

## GETTING BACK TO WORK

### Burnicle's tips for moving forward:

- **Take a break.** If you can afford to rest up for a few weeks, do that. Get your head around what has happened. Once you start a new job, you may not get annual leave for a while.
- **Don't rush to meet people about new jobs.** You get one chance to impress and, if you're not in the right frame of mind yet, you may waste it. Also, don't just wait for jobs to be advertised – be proactive and approach companies you'd like to work for.
- **Make sure your CV reflects the things you've achieved in your career.** Don't make it a job description.
- **Set up daily emails to send you job searches.** Also, look at the careers sections on company websites.
- **Prepare for interviews.** Research the company you're meeting with. Rehearse your interview answers out loud. When you know it back to front, it'll come naturally. *The end*



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If you think you're suffering anxiety or depression, call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or see your GP.