

Mourning the Loss of Your Job

By Jeffrey Bornstein, MS, LPCC

In these uncertain times, many companies are laying off employees and putting a freeze on hiring. As a result, many individuals are finding themselves unemployed. The press has put a lot of focus on the financial stress that unemployment can have on individuals, their families and the economy. What hasn't received a lot of attention is the emotional stress that unemployment can bring.

The emotional response to losing your job has been compared to that of losing a loved one. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, author of *On Death and Dying*, describes five discrete stages that individuals commonly go through when experiencing loss, including one's job:

1. **Denial or shock:** Even though you might have received your pink slip and packed your office, the reality of being laid off might not have settled in. You may keep expecting the phone to ring or to receive an email stating that it was all a mistake.
2. **Anger:** Even though market conditions may be the reason you lost your job, you may become angry that your company included you on the list of employees that they let go.
3. **Bargaining:** You may actually call your boss or other colleagues that did not lose their job and offer your services for less or that you would be willing to work part-time.
4. **Depression:** Once the reality sets in and you realize that, no matter what you do, you cannot get your old job back, then you may become depressed. Symptoms of depression include having a lack of energy or motivation, isolating yourself from friends and family, insomnia or sleeping all the time, overeating or losing your appetite all together, and losing interest in things that once gave you pleasure.
5. **Acceptance:** At this point, you accept your situation and make plans to change it.

Each individual may experience each stage in a different order and / or with a different intensity level. Mourning the loss of your job is a natural process. Here are some suggestions for going through the mourning process in a healthy manner:

- **Give yourself time** to go through these steps and understand that it is normal.
- **Take time before make any big decisions** (e.g. moving, getting married, etc.) while going through this process. Big decisions made quickly may add to your emotional stress and exacerbate your reaction.
- **Keep yourself physically healthy.** Eating right, doing exercise, and getting enough sleep can help balance the emotional pain that you are feeling.
- **Do reach out to friends and families.** These are the times that we need friends and family most. It takes a strong person to reach out and say that you need some help.
- **Focus on the big picture.** The recession will not last forever. This may be a good time to reexamine your career and life goals.

When you decide it can be helpful to talk to a professional to help you through this process, call me on my confidential voicemail at **(323) 362-6555**.