

LAYOFFS & BIG FEELINGS



HOW TO NAVIGATE
THE HUMAN IMPACT
OF LOSING A JOB

PHIL PUTNAM COACHING



It happened while I was on a plane to Chicago. A sharp, specific emotional pang hit the side of my neck where my jaw meets my ear and I said to myself, "Oooo, I'm angry. But what am I angry about?"

I was angry about being laid off 6 weeks earlier. My response to the anger surprised me, though. "Now that it's surfaced, I can process it and move forward."

How mature! How *unexpectedly* mature! LOL. Apart from the comedy of the moment, it gave a helpful reminder that the emotional turmoil of job loss is not a stopping point. It's not a place you live. It's a passage in a larger journey, and it is to be learned from and left behind.

So many parts of that passage can slow us down and get us stuck, but I want something better than stuck for all of us. That's why this guide exists; to be a simple map through the complex, craggy terrain of layoffs and big feelings.

-Phil

1.

Anger

Spicy. Feisty. Stirred up. Heated. We have so many terms for anger other than “anger” itself, and I think this is largely because there’s a lot of social risk associated with being labeled as an “angry person.” But this also makes it hard to process anger when we feel it.

And wow, we sure feel it when we’ve been laid off or fired. We feel the genuine anger for how the job loss came about and how it impacts us. We may also feel anger at ourselves for feeling anger in the first place.

My framework for handling anger is just any scene from any movie/tv show where a human is slowly approaching a dragon: sure, it can kill you, but if you approach with respect and confidence, you can befriend it too.

TOP TACTICS:

- * Expect it to be part of your job loss journey. Don’t judge yourself for feeling it.
- * Expect it to play by its own rules and run on its own schedule. It’s often sporadic, comes in peaks and valleys. Let it.
- * It’s ok to fear anger, at first. But try to moved beyond fear to familiarity, understanding and friendship with it. Once you see that anger is more than just fangs, you’ll see that it’s something you can tame and transcend over time.

Fear

2.

“How am I gonna pay my bills?”

“How long will it take to find my next job?”

“Will they hire someone at my age and experience level?”

Fears like these are part of anyone’s job loss journey, regardless of how much money you have saved or what you’ve accomplished previously in your career. The main danger fear poses to a job loss journey is stillness. Inertia.

Getting stuck and sinking into it like emotional quicksand while the time-sensitive problem of regaining access to income becomes more severe.

TOP TACTICS:

- * Don’t expect the fear to go away. It will fluctuate, but it won’t go away entirely. So learn to make progress in the midst of it.
- * Talk about your fears with other people. This will reduce your isolation, surface new perspectives on your situation, and make you feel more capable of handling the vulnerability that comes along with job loss.
- * Find and focus on things you can control. This will soothe your survival instincts and free up mental bandwidth that you can use on executing next steps.

3.

Grief

A job loss is a big loss in a human life and it causes significant disruption on a number of levels. It changes the ways you solve the problems of your survival (housing, food, safety, etc.) and forces change in your perspective on yourself and your place in the world.

Grief is a natural human response to this level of loss and change. It's a complex, layered process that leads us through the emotional steps required to get to the other side.

The world around us may say it's dramatic to include grief in conversations about job loss, which is why honoring our own experience is so helpful when we're on the job loss journey.

TOP TACTICS:

- * Expect and anticipate that grief will be part of your job loss journey.
- * But also, don't judge yourself for being surprised by when and how it shows up. We're very rarely reminded that grief is a part of job loss, so it's not something that is top of mind for most of us.
- * Let grieving be one area where you apply less control over the depth of impact and the timing of how things proceed. Go where it takes you and be willing to dive deep because unprocessed grief often comes back in the future as anger.

Shame/Embarrassment

4.

The world around us tells us that every job loss is a personal failure, regardless of how much our actions were a factor in it. The shame and embarrassment we feel is one of the sharpest proofs of how little grace there is in the world's approach to it and how much we internalize that approach.

The truth is that it's never all our fault, and it's never all someone else's. Shame we may feel over our part in it is legitimate and we gain so much from learning the lessons it has to teach us.

But it's never necessary or helpful to accept shame and embarrassment for the ways in which the people and systems around us failed us.

TOP TACTICS:

- * Be honest with yourself about your part in your job loss and take responsibility. This is the first step to processing legitimate embarrassment, and it also helps you identify and be confident about which parts are not your fault.
- * Give yourself permission to blame others for their part in your layoff, whether it's people or systems or both.
- * When you catch yourself blaming yourself for things beyond your responsibility, actively remind yourself that it's not all your fault.

5.

Betrayal

In my opinion, this one is the thorniest emotional response to job loss, primarily due to the nature of most employment relationships: technically, they're temporary private agreements that either party can end with little to no penalty.

But the human reality of employment is an exchange of trust that produces a level of dependency. And when one party axes the other, feeling betrayed is a natural response.

Also, when you lose your job, you lose a certain source of income to care for yourself and your loved ones. This feels like a personal attack that is out of alignment with the trust that employment is built on, and can feel like the employer doesn't care about the difficulty they've placed you and your loved ones in.

TOP TACTICS:

- * Think before you act out. It's natural to want to settle scores or extract an apology or acknowledgment from a former employer, but these actions have a high risk of reputation damage to you and are unlikely to serve you.
- * Talk it out with people you trust, and especially with people who are outside of your job loss universe. Their objectivity will help put the ferocity of your feelings into perspective.
- * Expect nothing from the people/organization who ended your job. Not to say they don't owe you human decency, but job loss is not a fair experience. Expecting nothing from them is about improving your peace of mind, not about them being let off the hook.

Want to dig deeper into navigating the job loss journey and getting to whatever the next phase is for you?

I'd love to help you with that.

Click [here](#) to book a free call and we'll make it happen.

-Phil

PHIL PUTNAM COACHING



PHILPUTNAM.COM