

6 Steps for Managing Job-Search Stress

By Mary Jane Hurley Brant, M.S., CGP

Millions of people have lost jobs in this economy and finding a new one is a challenge. Anxiety and stress fill the lives of many people. Let's talk about managing the stress of a job search. Anyone in this situation, or loves someone who is, might consider these six suggestions.

Step 1 – Do not internalize a job loss or job search into your personal identity. Whether you are a new graduate or a semi-retired person whose 401K was cut in half this year, you are not in this situation because of your personal failure. A lot of good people have lost their jobs in the last few years as loss of funding has cut or even eliminated budgets at public, private, and charter schools, from pre-school to higher education.

Step Two – Remember those things you do well. Looking for work often erodes confidence, lowers self-esteem, and makes people forget how terrific they are at many other things. Let's say that your job as a high school principal was terminated and new positions are not readily available. While pursuing your future position and waiting for calls to interview, return to a pastime or hobby you do well and crank it up a notch

If your hobby is photography, engage in it more fully. Taking part in an activity that you enjoy, do well, and is productive reduces stress hormones and relaxes the part of the brain that has been working at the job search. Furthermore, it is a distraction that can refresh you, allowing you to be more on top of your game when the next interview is before you.

Step Three – Allow yourself to grieve the loss of the old job so you do not succumb to paralyzing fear searching for a new one. Also, one loss in life often unconsciously resurrects other losses. So the loss of a loved one, the loss of a marriage, and the loss of good health all may compound feelings and reactions to the loss of employment.

As you grieve your job loss, also think about what you miss from the old job (besides the income, which I appreciate is important). Knowing what you miss clarifies what you should look for in the next position. If, for example, you enjoyed the camaraderie

at your old job in a moderately sized school, working at a university with a 20,000 student enrollment probably will not do.

Step Four – Initiate positive and proactive activities such as volunteering. Helping out someone else keeps us from dwelling on ourselves. Become active in a church, a temple, synagogue, or community organization—even if you never have before. Managing stress often begins with openness to new ideas and being part of a supportive community. Being optimistic and exercising your faith keeps you more hopeful.

It also is important to network diligently and not rely on only one type of resource. That is, spending eight hours daily posting your résumés online is not enough. You need to have direct contact with people. Pick up Tony Beshara's book *Job Search Solution* for some great practical ideas. If you have a few extra dollars, hire a coach to keep you accountable and encouraged.

Step Five – Ask yourself whether you are angry and anxious. Ask others if you appear angry or anxious. You need your friends or your mate right now, so turn toward them not against them. If you are angry, commit to working through your anger or managing your anxiety. Unprocessed anger and unacknowledged anxiety can hurt you in an interview, as well as affect all relationships—old and new.

Why? Because underlying attitudes about an old job or the loss of a job come across in an interview through body language and the tone of your answers. When stuck in a place of anger or anxiety, try to consider what new door wants to open within you that you may have not known was there. It also may be necessary to let go of needing to control a situation over which you probably no control. Remember, change what you can change and accept what you cannot change.

Step Six – Consider a health checkup and talk with your doctor about your circumstances, if managing the situation or your reactions becomes extremely difficult. You may benefit from a temporary medication due to serotonin depletion that can occur when someone is hit with major stress or loss.

In closing, looking for another job invites creative thinking and resourcefulness, but those qualities are just some of the great strengths of the teaching professional! Be the student you love to see in your own class and remember not to internalize your job loss into your personal identity, focus on all the things you do well, let yourself

grieve your old job and other losses and accept your feelings right where they are. You also might want to catch a cat nap, too. Those 20 winks will assist you in maintaining health and focus. Besides, you won't have a chance to nap once you land that new position.

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