

My Personal Methods Of Coping With Job Loss!

I hope this helps.

by Gary Desy

1) Rule #1

I have some personal coping methods that I would like to share with you, in the hope that you may find something of use to apply to your own situation. The ability to cope in any given situation is the realization that,

“If I can change it, then I will, but if I can not, then there is no sense in fretting about it.”

That’s the long and short of it. If you are capable of applying what I have just stated, you will be a survivor also.



2) My Past And Current Situations

My situation in our plant is not that dissimilar than many of my peers. I have seen three years of layoffs over the past seven years. I have seen numerous weekly layoffs and countless layoff notices. Our plants became unstable in 1992 when we received announcement of the foundry closure. Not a day goes by when negative rumours of layoffs don’t emerge. I guess this makes us wounded survivors.

Most of us today are either under the threat of layoff or are laid off. Few of us in our plant, are in a position where this is not our reality. Low seniority in our plant is twenty years with an average age of fifty five years old. I am by no means an expert in dealing with the physical or psychological effects of job loss. I am however, one of the most optimistic and positive people I know. As I stated earlier, it is my hope is that sharing my coping strategies, may help you devise your own strategies for your current and future situations.

3) Helpless? Hopeless? I Think Not!

Our work force is not very different from any other, in this global economy. Our competition is no longer with the business down the street or in the next town, but world wide. There are numerous reasons why we may feel helpless to control our destinies. The future and control of our plant doesn’t even belong to our current managers. They are corks on the water, similar to us, with their destinies formulated in Detroit. The point is that management is helpless to help themselves, except in the smallest ways, but they are controlling our world, which seems to be about the only thing they can do to retain some semblance of power in their own minds. We cannot control their movements nor the activities of the world. We need to focus on ourselves and follow the #1 Rule.

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4) Rumours And Threats Of Layoffs and Job Insecurities

In larger plants such as ours, rumours run rampant. The old saying is, “If you haven’t heard a rumour by 10 AM then start one”. All kidding aside, rumours can make or break our day if we let them. Most of us operate on bits of valid information we hear on a multitude of topics. Seldom do we ever have all the facts. This information is shared with others and perhaps embellished a bit, or someone voices their take on the limited available information. Each time

the information moves between us, it is swelling with personal slants on what it may or may not mean. Before we know it, the rumour has made the rounds back to the original owner and they know a bit of it is true and perhaps this added information is something they were not privy to. And so goes the rumour mill.

The best thing we can do is not to spread what we hear. This has not always been one of my personal strong points. I tend to put a positive slant on everything I hear, attempting to find or imagine the silver lining. Is this realistic?" I don't know, but it helps me keep my sanity.

Because of our company's manpower employment volatility, we have been subjected to numerous layoffs and threats of layoffs, and rumours of impending layoffs, so we are very gun-shy and most are stressed. To have someone with high seniority say, "don't let the rumours bother you", is not comforting because they really haven't experienced layoffs. For the remainder of us, rumours affect us physically and mentally. To cope with this I tend to consider the worse thing that could happen. Then I deal with that in my mind, deciding on a remedy, or the inevitability of it, or my inability to alter the outcome. Once I have dealt with the worse possible event that could take place, everything else seems manageable. A threat of layoff is the same thing as a rumour and I handle it in the same fashion.

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The one constant in the universe is change. Things will change whether we like it or not. Everything throughout my life has occurred through change. My survival depends on my attitude towards these changes. I am the person that I am because of my experiences and how I handled them. The changes will always come. Will I be ready? I consider myself adaptable because I feel that most everything works out for the best. With an attitude like this I'm constantly looking for the silver lining in any given situation. Rose coloured glasses? Perhaps. If I don't believe something is there, I likely won't see it.

5) Layoff Notices (In Writing)

A) Honest Open Family Discussions

This situation seems more desperate than rumours but, on the psychological level I handle it the same way as a rumour, until the day it happens. On the physical side, there are other things that can be done and lots of serious questions to ask myself and discuss with my family. Their support and perspective, helps me to see things in a different light. We are always striving for a peek at the silver lining, to see the good in any situation. If the situation is viewed as all bad we will suffer through every step of the way. I am what I think and will see only what I believe about a given situation. I will never see a silver lining if I am not looking for it.

If this layoff is going to happen to me, am I ready? Most of us are not. Few of us will enjoy the threat of layoff and a layoff notice is generally not received favourably. If you are among the many of us who will be psychologically and physically affected by a notice then care must be taken to lessen the impact on our minds and bodies.

B) Short Term Plan

For me, the worse thing that can happen in my life is that I lose someone I love. Everything after that is a very distant second. If I was to lose everything I own, I would still get by. That is not likely to happen, so this situation falls in between losing everything, and everything being fine. At times the only difference between these outcomes is my attitude towards the situation.

So now how do I get through the initial period and give myself room to breathe, organize and morn? Before layoff I make some initial plans. I am not going to worry about the long term, but rather just the first month or two. Having an initial plan will help ease the fear of the unknown because I have brought it to light and dealt with it. This will buy me some time.

I make a plan, but then set it aside and I try not to dwell on it too much, trusting that I will do the right thing when or if the situation occurs. Remember this is once again just a threat, with the knife close but not drawing blood. The reality is that until it happens it hasn't happened. There may not be anything I can do about the outcome of this notice, but I don't have to like it. Nor should I run from it. Fear of the unknown is the greatest factor causing stress. Study it, plan for the beginning of it, face it, and then stop dreading it. I am as ready as I can be.

C) Attitude

I do my best to remain optimistic and positive. These attitudes will change nothing on managements end, but my attitude will have a good effect on me and perhaps those who come in contact with me. Hey, it can't hurt. It is our choice as to how we will face this challenge. We have little control over many things in our lives but, how we respond is an area where we have full control through our choices. My attitude is very transparent. It is visible to others and has the tendency to draw like attitudes from others also. If I'm bummed I will drag down others and their contact will be short and not likely welcome. If I'm as positive as I can be at the moment then I will illicit this from others and they will respond similarly. I'm not saying that I'm happy and bubbly all the time, but, I can trick myself into a better mood if I so choose. My attitude is my choice, most of the time. I choose to have a good attitude.

6) Getting The Boot

A) Time To Implement My Short Term Plan

So it has really happened. No longer a threat, layoff is now a reality. Was I ready? Now is the time to set my short term goals and plans in motion? Was I caught off guard? If I don't have any plans, now would be a good time to sit with someone I love and trust and discuss the near and distant future. This short term plan helps me lessen the fears of this future situation. My long term plans and responsibilities may very well require a more concerted effort to reorganize my family's needs within this altered future. For now I have to put my short term plan into effect.

This is a time of grieving. No matter how ready I am I may still go through some negative steps. I am grateful for this short term plan so I can also allow myself some grieving time. Grieving sounds like an extreme term for the given situation but this may be similar to a loss. It's not bad, it just is. facing a loss is the first step in a healthy healing process.

B) Long Term Planning and Honesty

The next step is to use my short term plan as a means of gaining some breathing space to design a plan for the long haul. The main thing I have to keep in mind at this juncture is to be painfully honest with myself and my family. Things are not as they were. If all the cards are on the table there may be things that I may need to do temporarily to have peace of mind. Some things may have to be subtracted and some things added. The more honest I am with myself and my family, the easier it will be to get cooperation from them and myself. Hiding the truth will only create fear and anxiety for them and a feeling of isolation for me. If everyone is involved then they will take pride in their part and experience less stress about their future. If I

were single then I would likely plan with someone I trust. It is always good to get a second opinion and a different slant on the situation. In the end it will always be my choice.

C) Family And Friends

These are my favourite things. These people are my greatest strength. It is at times like this that I can derive my greatest comfort from a simple conversation. This is one reason for calling the first meeting at the union hall just after the layoff. I wanted to form a support group, helping each other get through this tough time. It has worked splendidly for many of us. Also the love and support from my family has been unwavering and I can not to begin give them enough credit. Like I stated earlier, I need to be painfully honest with them so we can forge a plan and they can be strengthened by it and receive mutual support.

D) Use This Opportunity To Get Closer

Our lives can be filled with things to do, and I find this time is so perfect to rekindle my closeness with my family. It is my choice to use this time as a gift. It is an opportunity to enjoy and mature. If the stresses are allowed to fester, the relationships suffer. This is a time to be open and frank, and allow myself this time to openly show my feelings for those I love, to an even greater extent. I do everything in my power to be more patient, understanding and loving, during this period. I mustn't forget that my family is going through this also. Being laid off numerous times in my working career, I had the opportunity to put my money where my mouth is and develop an even closer relationship with my wife, boys and family. It got to the point where my boys were actually looking forward to my layoffs. They are both grown now and working, and it will be interesting to see how they will handle their first layoff?

Layoffs are inevitable for everyone sooner or later. My survival, and that of my family, depends on my attitude. It puts me in mind of a few sayings that may apply, "Anything that doesn't kill me makes me stronger", or, "There is always someone worse off than me", or "One hundred years from now what will it matter?" These sayings may hold some truths but, the reality is, it will take a concerted effort for me to mold this situation into a positive opportunity, and come out of it on the other side, a better person than I did going in. I actively take time to rekindle the close relationships that I have with my family and friends.

E) Do Not Avoid Life

Our friends and acquaintances do not know how to react to my being unemployed. Once I reassure them that I am doing the best I can, considering the circumstances, they begin to relax. The main thing is not to make them feel uncomfortable so they remain close and in contact. Social situations may make us feel uneasy because of some misconception that we are to blame for our current situation. Mingling and socializing is a very important part of normalizing my life as much as possible. I cannot hide from this and it has always been more productive for me to face my fears and that way I minimize them. I avoid complaining and showing any animosity. Although people may ask, in most cases they are being polite. If I handle the conversation in a soft and light manner, and then move on to other topics, they feel relief. I don't avoid parts of my life, but I do present a lower impacted presentation of my situation.

I know who my close friends are and who truly care, and to these people I open up. I fully open up within our support group, which I will talk about next. This is where I am with people who truly care and are doing what they can to help themselves and each other. These people have grown to be close friends.

F) Join Or Create A Support Group

It was my pleasure and good fortune to help create the Skilled Trades Association. It was created initially to give moral and physical support to the people in our plant who were recently laid off. It has subsequently grown into a program supporting people in and out of work, not only in our local, but much further a field. Helping others in this program has helped me lessen the impact of my own layoff. It was amazing to see how much it helped me, by helping others get through this trying time. We all do things for our own reasons and it is great when it impacts positively on others also.

There are many avenues to garner support from within our communities. A few phone calls, or some internet time on our community sites, will produce numerous helpful groups to assist seeing us through. There is also help within our plant. Our union leadership is always ready to assist. Don't be too proud to ask for help and guidance or to offer your help to others. There are also many of us who receive comfort from our faith and the people who guide us within them.

G) Worry

Worry can become a real threat to our health both mentally and physically. Worry about the future can immobilize us and render all our good intentions infertile. I must try to live in the present. Worry about any given situation can fester out of control making things seem much worse than they are. Worry can become anxiety, if it is allowed to go unchecked. Depression, panic attacks, a multitude of physical and mental problems and strained relationships are just a few things which will make the situation even worse. All of these things can stem from my thoughts, so if I wish to avoid them I need to think correctly. I like to take stock of how things are today. Think of the good things and once again apply the #1 Rule.

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Literally thousands of books about worry have been written. I can only speak for myself when I say that for me to reduce worry; I need to face any negative situation forcefully. Creating a plan by deciding what I can do and doing it, is the first step. The second step is to realize that there are some things that I do not have control over. If it is out of my hands, and I have done everything I can, then my worrying about it will not change it. Facing a fear diminishes it.

H) Control Is Within My Reach

I can make physical changes which may affect the outcome of situations. Even more important is the fact that my perception and response to the situation is entirely within my control. My greatest ally is my attitude and the way I view change. Ten people can see the same situation and react differently to it.

I am laid off, my marriage broke up, I have lost my home or even worse, I have lost a love one. All of these major situations can cause traumatic stresses. There are numerous levels of emotional processes that I may or may not experience. Denial, anger, disbelief, fear, retribution, and acceptance are just a few stages we have to cope with. Humans have tremendous resilience. We also have an inner strength to draw on. I will share something with you now that you may find it hard to agree with.

“I have complete control over my decisions.” I may not always choose to take control, but that will be my decision.

I) Choices

Let me explain with an example. There was a prisoner in a POW camp for many years. He was continually tortured physically and mentally. When he was released, he wrote a book about his experiences. This man was controlled by others to an extent that most of us will never experience, or comprehend. He said something that has stuck with me since I read his words. "They controlled my life and my body but I controlled my mind". He made conscious decisions every day about what he would hold onto. He controlled what he could and had to let go of the things he could not control. He made his choices and in that way he remained in control and maintained his sanity.

This man realized that control over himself required a choice. We have choices also. We have the total power to choose how we will respond to any given situation. Crying, laughing, anger, love, fighting or running and other responses are all appropriate choices to be dealt out when we decide to choose one. Life does not always hand us positive situations. It will be up to us to do what we can to deal with them and forge them into something we can handle.

We will choose our steps and directions. If we do nothing then that is our choice. If we do everything we can to do, to the best of our ability, then that is our choice. Before we choose to respond physically to this uncomfortable situation we must choose our mental response. We have the power to choose. It is likely the only real power we do have.

If I have done everything I can, then I may as well be happy and as positive as I can. If I have not done everything I can, then I had better make those tough decisions, and get at it. This is my responsibility, and my choice. This is my philosophy. I will repeat it here and it is the only real meat of this whole conversation.

"If I can change it, then I will, but if I can not, then there is no sense in fretting about it."

The remainder is all attitude. I can be tricked. The way I think, becomes the way I act, and the way I'm perceived by others. Self respect is not something someone can give me. It is my choice. And it will buoy me through positive times and times which are not so positive.

7) Tools

Ok enough philosophy. If you want more then buy my book LOL. Here are some tips on maintaining your sanity through tough times. I have not gone into job searching here because most of us at GM are not looking in the hope of being recalled. Job searching is a whole other topic and best covered by people better suited than me.

A) Maintain A Daily Routine

Early in this situation, I have to set my daily routine, which will include many of my pre layoff activities. This has the effect of normalizing my day as much as possible. I start each day with a visit to the corner restaurant for coffee. I meet friends and acquaintances and feel like I'm in touch. I do not read the newspaper or watch news. This stuff is never good. If you thrive on the paper that is fine but I see too much negativity in it, so I avoid it. I don't vary my rising time much and I try to keep it early. The longer I sleep the more difficult my day.

B) Exercise For Body And Mind

Physical activity enhances psychological well-being and relieves symptoms of depression and anxiety. Here are some of the factors involved:

Regular exercise helps to feel in control. This sense of control over the body may translate to an improved sense of control over other aspects of life, a key defence against stress.

Exercise promotes well-being and relaxation. Regular exercisers demonstrate higher levels of self esteem and confidence and maintain a sense of self discipline. The individual acts upon the belief, "I am in charge of myself and can improve my health and fitness."

Moderate physical activity is a natural, physiological outlet for a body in the "fight or flight" state of arousal frequently associated with stress. It cleanses the body of adrenaline, can lower the blood pressure, and relaxes tight muscles.

Exercise produces neurotransmitters called endorphins in the brain. These are the body's own natural tranquilizers. Endorphins can make one feel calm and relaxed during and for up to three hours after moderate physical activity. This elevation in mood has been referred to as the runners' high but is also experienced by those involved in other forms of exercise.

Exercise can cause many people who are physically active to give up unhealthy and stressful habits that interfere with exercise. Smokers may cut down or quit because smoking hinders aerobic performance. Others may eat more nutritiously to improve performance.

Exercise can be a group or solo activity. Some individuals seek and develop alliances with other exercisers, which may provide social support - another stress reliever. Others may prefer some private time to exercise alone to "clear the head." Still others prefer some of both, depending on mood and circumstances.

A brisk walk or dancing or some heart pounding activity for 20 minutes each day is amazingly uplifting. I feel like I could take on the world and everything seems so much lighter. If your partner, or a friend, can join you it is even better. My favourite heart pounding activity is to dance to the oldies. That is a frightening sight, if you drive past my workshop. Exercise helps me to face the tasks ahead, but of course I'm going to have to choose to do it.

C) Work Around The House

My personal favourite is to do something outside no matter what the weather is like. It doesn't get my heart pounding, but it gives me enormous pleasure. I don't mind cleaning, so the wife always has chores for me. (Such a thoughtful girl) The important thing is to remain active. Through daily activity, I make myself earn any relaxation time. One of the important things for me to do is to set small attainable goals each day. I think about the things I could do the night before and choose something I'm sure that I can accomplish. This may not be the only thing that I will do tomorrow but, I will get it done and I feel like I have had a successful day. It could be as simple as trimming a patch of grass, to cleaning out a junk drawer or seeing if I can help a neighbour straighten his garage. Just doing something doesn't seem to have the same gratifying impact as something that I planned to do.

D) Volunteering

There are numerous organizations that can use our help. Volunteering our time and energy not only helps others, it helps us to maintain a feeling of self worth. This coping strategy is very rewarding. For me it was helping to create the Skilled Trades Association. This took a lot

of my time and I felt like I was truly making a difference. That worked for me, and each of us needs to find some way to help others. By helping others, we help ourselves. At a meeting today I heard some of the long term guys on layoff state that, they are very bored. They have done their projects around the house, and no money to do more. It is winter and not too much to do outside. Here is where volunteering has a tremendous positive impact on our life. Just do it. It works.

E) Eat Regularly And Healthy

I find that too many starchy foods in my diet, makes me listless and uncomfortable. Eating more often but smaller amounts keeps me going, especially fruits and vegetables and protein. If I eat heavy, or too much, it stops all my good intentions in their tracks.

Some people's body furnaces burn hot, and they can eat anything. I tend to store everything, so I need to stoke my furnace with just a bit of fuel at a time. I used to love beer, but it is a starch which gives me the munchies, so I stick to a glass of dry white wine at night.

It is easy to supplement good intentions and hard work with a drink, a toke or medication, drugs, overeating or ? All of these things may have a purpose or place, but should never be a substitute. This is a time when I may not be on the most stable ground and I need to keep focused and sharp. An easy fix is temporary and will only serve to compound my problems if I am not careful.

F) Sleep

Earn it! I don't sleep well if I haven't kept busy during the day. The more I sit around the more tired I get. As I stated earlier, I get up early and jumpstart my day with a visit to the restaurant for a coffee and some conversation. Going to bed close to a regular time has the effect of setting my mind in a routine and a glass of dry wine seems to help also. I try not to watch too much TV or take naps. All of these activities seem to dull my brain and make me listless. I try to earn everything I do. It makes me appreciate them more.

G) Shower every day

I like to shower every day as it makes me feel better and renewed. Depending on my daily activities I may have more than one. A couple days of not showering and I feel like I'm not on track. It not only gets me clean and feeling refreshed, it also ends something and gets me ready to begin something. It gives me a starting or ending point to my day. I feel as though I have accomplished something and here is a fresh start. I never underestimate the rejuvenating effects of a clean up.

H) Relaxation

This is a very broad area. Hobbies, exercising, cards, meditation, gardening, reading, praying, television, etc can fall into this category. Each of us has our own method of relaxing. The type of relaxation I am speaking of here for me is being able to let go of my thoughts and focus on what I am doing, or not doing.

For me that method is meditating. Stated simply, it's a matter of being comfortable, quiet, and listening to my deep, controlled, breathing and dismissing each thought that tries to invade my mind. It is not easy to do but it is an exercise which allows my brain to un-focus on stressors and focus on not focusing. This helps me and who knows, it may help you.

Another meditation I do, helps me to deal with a specific situation. It is visualization, and I apply it to a circumstance or person troubling me. I hesitated to reveal it here because it is very personal but it may give you some stress relief as it does me. I find that it defuses the hold over my thoughts from negative situations or people, and allows me to put them in a different more controlled light.

I focus on the situation or event or person or anything that is occupying my thoughts negatively. I make myself benevolent to it. It could be love, compassion, understanding, forgiveness or what ever I feel is required to bestow on it to lessen its grip and immediately feel relief from its effects. I chose to remove its hold on me by applying positive responses to it rather than negative thoughts.

This works for me but something else may work for you. The secret to true relaxation is to come out the other side refreshed. How you do that is your choice. No situation or person can truly control me unless I give them that power.

l) Self Respect

It is called self respect, because I am the only one who can give it to me. I am also the only one who can take it away. This situation has been thrust upon me. I did not create it and there is little I can do to reverse it. I am not a bad person for it, I am not a failure, nor am I any less a person because of it. I am still the person I was before it, and may even be a better person because of it. I am who I believe myself to be. I am not what I do, but more how think and live my life. My thoughts control my actions and I will generally experience those things that I believe I should. If I want better, I must think better, and be ready for and create positive change.

I mustn't sit on my hands waiting for positive change because the decision to do and create and experience better, is within me. I will do all the physical things I can, to cope with this situation but the ultimate deciding factor is my attitude. Laying blame only reinforces the thought that, I am being controlled. I must take responsibility for my choices and move forward. We have the power to control our responses to the world around us, and move in a direction which will nurture us and perhaps those around us.

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