

Coping with layoff survivor's guilt after COVID-19 job cuts

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News of job losses due to the COVID-19 pandemic reaches us daily. While people who lose their jobs can be strongly impacted, it's important to recognize that people who survive job cuts face their own set of consequences. If you are among this group of layoff or furlough "survivors," you may experience stress as well as feelings of anxiety or depression. These reactions are normal and will diminish with time. Below are some of the most common challenges survivors of downsizing face, along with tips for overcoming them.

Common challenges

Guilt

You may have heard the phrase, "layoff survivor's guilt." Although the decisions about layoffs were not in their control, some remaining employees may feel guilty that they were "saved" from the job cuts. Those still employed may ask: "Why did I keep my job when other people lost theirs?" or "I should have been the one to go and (name of co-worker) should still be here." Layoff survivor's guilt can lead to depression, anxiety, tension and sleep disorders.

Stress

Any change is stressful, and downsizing—whether you stay or leave—is particularly stressful. Not only do you have to cope with the stress of job insecurity, but you may have more work with fewer resources.

Anxiety

You may still be on the job but you may find yourself asking, "For how long?" The anxiety caused by job cuts doesn't end with initial layoffs. Those still employed often live in a state of shock, wondering if the worst is over or still to come.

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Tips for layoff survivors

Guilt

Remind yourself the decisions about staff cuts were out of your hands.

Think about the reasons you are still there, and try to understand your company's rationale for maintaining you and/or your position.

Support colleagues who have lost their jobs. Offering assistance may help you feel better about the situation.

Stress

Discuss changes in your responsibilities and capacity with your supervisor, and work out realistic plans for successfully completing your job.

Realign expectations of productivity based on team changes. Everyone may be doing more with less.

Be flexible with shifts in priorities, team restructures, and potential longer hours.

Gain clarity on new job responsibilities so that you are aware of the criteria on which you are being evaluated. If you need additional skills, ask for training.

Recognize any stress you are experiencing and learn relaxation and stress management techniques.

Anxiety

Get the facts. Recognize that fear of the unknown makes this situation seem far more threatening. If you know what will happen, you can begin to plan.

Recognize that no employer can ever offer a 100 percent guarantee of job stability.

Voice your feelings and concerns to your manager or supervisor, and ask for information that will help you understand where the company is headed and how you fit in.

Utilize staff meetings to offer ideas that may help the company, your team and yourself.

Be aware that management may know little more than you and be feeling similar. Be willing to listen to them.

Think about what you want professionally. Whether you remain with your company long-term or eventually move on, being actively involved in—and positively contributing to—reorganization can reduce anxiety.

Get support. Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) can help you deal with anxiety. Talk to your leader about how to move forward.

Downsizing is a workplace trend that has increased with the COVID-19 pandemic. It may be here to stay and undeniably creates anger, stress, fear and even trauma for surviving employees. You can ease the negative by acknowledging the situation, asking questions, communicating honestly, listening to others and exploring new ideas and ways of doing things. Take an active, positive role to reduce the trauma of downsizing. You will improve your chances of being part of a creative, profitable company and enhance your professional growth and opportunities for the future.

If you're struggling with any of these emotions related to restructuring, consider speaking with someone within your Employee Assistance Program. Speaking with an EAP professional can help you sort through your feelings and identify techniques for managing those emotions.



These non-insurance services are provided by Humana EAP and Work-Life Services. This is a general description of services which are subject to change. Please refer to your Human Resources contact for more information. Personal information about participants and members of their households remains confidential according to all applicable state and federal laws, unless disclosure is allowed by such laws.

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If you need help filing a grievance, call **1-866-440-6556** or if you use a **TTY**, call **711**.
- You can also file a civil rights complaint with the **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**, Office for Civil Rights electronically through their Complaint Portal, available at <https://ocrportal.hhs.gov/ocr/portal/lobby.jsf>, or at **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**, 200 Independence Avenue, SW, Room 509F, HHH Building, Washington, DC 20201, **1-800-368-1019, 800-537-7697 (TDD)**. Complaint forms are available at <https://www.hhs.gov/ocr/office/file/index.html>.
- **California residents:** You may also call California Department of Insurance toll-free hotline number: **1-800-927-HELP (4357)**, to file a grievance.

Auxiliary aids and services, free of charge, are available to you. 1-866-440-6556 (TTY: 711)

Humana provides free auxiliary aids and services, such as qualified sign language interpreters, video remote interpretation, and written information in other formats to people with disabilities when such auxiliary aids and services are necessary to ensure an equal opportunity to participate.

Language assistance services, free of charge, are available to you. 1-866-440-6556 (TTY: 711)

Español (Spanish): Llame al número arriba indicado para recibir servicios gratuitos de asistencia lingüística.

繁體中文 (Chinese): 撥打上面的電話號碼即可獲得免費語言援助服務。

Tiếng Việt (Vietnamese): Xin gọi số điện thoại trên đây để nhận được các dịch vụ hỗ trợ ngôn ngữ miễn phí.

한국어 (Korean): 무료 언어 지원 서비스를 받으려면 위의 번호로 전화하십시오.

Tagalog (Tagalog – Filipino): Tawagan ang numero sa itaas upang makatanggap ng mga serbisyo ng tulong sa wika nang walang bayad.

Русский (Russian): Позвоните по номеру, указанному выше, чтобы получить бесплатные услуги перевода.

Kreyòl Ayisyen (French Creole): Rele nimewo ki pi wo la a, pou resevwa sèvis èd pou lang ki gratis.

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Deutsch (German): Wählen Sie die oben angegebene Nummer, um kostenlose sprachliche Hilfsdienstleistungen zu erhalten.

日本語 (Japanese): 無料の言語支援サービスをご要望の場合は、上記の番号までお電話ください。

فارسی (Farsi)

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Diné Bizaad (Navajo): Wóda hí béésh bee hani'í bee wolta'ígíí bich'í' hódíílnih éí bee t'áá jiik'eh saad bee áká'ánída'áwo'déé nika'adoowoł.

العربية (Arabic)

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