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Managing Stress in Uncertain Times

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Any change in our lives that requires us to adapt and alter our regular behavior can potentially cause stress. Whether changes are perceived as negative or positive, change is still stressful. Being in career transition when the economy is in crisis is certainly a very difficult place to find oneself. Dealing with the stress of financial uncertainty and job loss may be the most important aspects of your transition.

With any job transition, there is always loss. There may be friends that you enjoyed at work and routines that you got used to. For some people, the job was tied to future dreams and these dreams may need adjusting. As with any loss, there can be normal sadness and depression. Feelings of shame or regret may cause some sleepless nights and feelings of aloneness.

The important thing during the initial stages of loss is to get plenty of support. Some people find this easier than others. You may be someone who has a large network of friends who will come to your aid during a bad time. Or, you might be someone who rarely relies on others or finds it difficult to talk about your feelings. Whatever the case, you need people in your corner to help you get past the initial grief and get your life moving forward again.

People cope in different ways during the initial stages of job loss. Symptoms of denial, fear, anger, and depression are considered normal after loss or dramatic change. Some people like to get right to work on a resume and get started on a job search. To this type of person, keeping busy and motivated really helps. Other people spend time mourning while they examine what went wrong or get immobilized by the sudden loss. Others may fall in between these extremes or go back and forth between sadness and action.

We each handle stress differently so there's no right or wrong answer to how to handle stress during times of change. Here are some tips for getting through this difficult period:

- **Be prepared for some psychological distress** and take good care of yourself during this difficult time. Do the things that you know help you to manage stress, such as maintaining good nutrition or taking quiet time.

Sometimes a stop at the gym or a brief walk will be enough to help you turn the day around and get a different perspective.

- **Use the stress as a timeout** to take stock of your own situation. Changes in the workplace can often lead to new thinking about your career. For example, there may be opportunities due to changes in the marketplace or changes in technology that might not have existed when you started this job.
- **Slow down a bit** if you need time to think. Take on what you can reasonably accomplish. Talk to a career counselor, your friends, and your professional network about what has happened and what you are considering for the future.
- **Acknowledge your feelings**, and use the opportunity to re-balance your life priorities. If you have been overworking, it may take some time to get perspective about work/life balance and how you want your life to be now. Make sure you spend enough time alone during this process. Write in a journal or revive old hobbies to help re-connect with yourself.
- **Establish a "fall-back position."** Come up with an alternate plan for making money if it takes time to find a job. Set specific dates and monetary needs for those plans. It may be a good time to seek financial advice on reducing credit card debt, re-balancing your portfolio, and/or making sure you have enough accessible cash. Sometimes just getting organized and making lists can help you to gain back some control.

Occasionally, a job loss can trigger a major depression or other similar mental health issues. If you find yourself getting increasingly depressed, losing weight, or worrying obsessively, you need to talk to a counselor or psychologist to help you get back on track.

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