

WHAT TO DO IF YOU Lose Your Job

Here is practical advice from an expert on turning a setback into a new opportunity for advancement.

by Richard D. Gleason

SOMETIMES losing your job is the best thing that can happen. I certainly don't recommend it as entertainment, but if a pink slip forces you to analyze the road map of your career—where you came from, where you want to go, and how to get there—it may indeed be a disguised blessing.

In my work as a career counselor, I have seen many men with the resourcefulness to turn a setback into progress, who started their upward climb as a result of getting fired. While each man's story is different, their combined experience includes four steps:

1. Don't panic—plan.
2. Reappraise yourself.
3. Re-establish your goals.
4. Sell yourself as you would a product.

Sure, these sound simple, perhaps too simple to take seriously. But let's examine them one by one, then ask yourself how many job-seeking men try to relocate themselves in this methodical way.

I can assure you that most men don't find jobs. *Jobs find them!*

They bounce from payroll to payroll, hoping to find themselves accidentally, without taking the time and trouble to look themselves over, survey the job market, pick out the job in which they really can prosper—then go out and land it.

So if you should ever be so unlucky—or perhaps lucky—as to lose your job, try the following four steps.



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DON'T PANIC—PLAN!

DON'T PANIC. The average man works for five or six companies in his career. From at least one of his jobs, he is likely to be fired, or forced to resign; or the signs are so clear that he quits.

Recently a man came to me who had been a factory engineer with a railroad for 15 years. His intelligence and knowledge of the workings of his whole department brought him into a major difference with his supervisor and led to his being eased out. This man and I took inventory of his experience and we found he had been working below his real level of ability. This turned his initial fear into optimism, and he landed a job as an engineering executive with a railroad-equipment manufacturer at a 35-percent increase in salary—and, incidentally, with more responsibility than that of the man who had fired him!

In trying to relocate, many men try to deny that they lost their jobs. To be caught in a lie, even a well-meaning cover-up, might undermine your reputation far more than a discharge which might not damage you at all. Always keep in mind that the man interviewing you may have been fired at least once himself. The higher the job, the more likely is a firing to be called a resignation, but make no mistake about it: it has happened to almost everybody.

On the other hand, don't make a big production out of the fact you've been bounced. In an interview, you want to mention it quickly and neatly, so you can sell your positive virtues. One of my clients once complained to me that he had come out of an enormously complicated office hassle, and it would take a half-hour to explain why he had been shown the exit. I told him he'd be lucky to get a half-hour for his whole interview.

I asked him to prepare a 20-word explanation, not a word more. He came back with 35. Together, we cut it down to 18 and I told him to memorize it:

"My boss and I differed on a matter that I considered vital to the business, so I resigned."

The statement was entirely true and understandable (even commendable), and no further questions were asked. Beginning with his 19th word, he was telling what he had accomplished.

I can think of another amusing circumstance, this one concerning a top wheel in a major auto company who reported directly to the company president. He did not resign; he was just plain sacked and said so in his subsequent interviews.

"Call up that president," the applicant would urge. "Let him tell you what a so-and-so I am. Then while you're investigating me, investigate him, too. I'd like to hire the men he has fired."

The company president's reputation for supplying his competitors with fine men was already widely known, and the applicant was readily snapped up by another blue-chip firm.