

How to Provide Support to Laid Off Colleagues and Cope with Survivor Guilt

Change is inevitable, and unfortunately layoffs are all too common. Most employees have either watched as colleagues were laid off, or have been laid off themselves. Though layoff survivors retain their jobs, they must face a host of challenges, such as learning how to do more with less and processing a spectrum of challenging emotions. The use of effective coping skills can help layoff survivors remain focused and productive while providing support to their laid off colleagues.

Action Steps:

1. Acknowledge the obvious and offer support to laid off colleagues. Keep in touch, offer your sincere feelings and provide what assistance you can. This assistance may be as simple as:
 - Doing something to show you care and help reduce their stress (invite them to take a brief walk or join you for lunch, send a card).
 - Respect others' feelings. People cope with difficult situations in a variety of ways. If someone doesn't wish to discuss their lay off then let them know that you care and are available for support as needed.
 - Provide the name of a good headhunter or offer to put a colleague in touch with an employer who may be hiring.
 - Offer yourself as a reference.
2. Talk to friends and family about your feelings, or use employee assistance program (EAP) services. Don't be afraid to admit emotions such as guilt or anxiety to a trusted friend or counselor. You can also express concern or ask your manager about your newly expanded role. Be diplomatic and honest.
3. Cope effectively by practicing healthy behaviors that include adequate sleep, healthy eating, regular exercise, limiting alcohol, and maintaining positive routines.
4. Accept the change. This crisis will eventually pass and you may find yourself with new opportunities to learn and grow professionally.
5. Maintain a positive attitude. The cutbacks, while difficult, may improve your work environment. Give the changes a fair chance at success. If it doesn't work out, update your resume and put out feelers of your own. You may find a more suitable opportunity elsewhere.

Source: Bigelow, L. (June 29, 2011) eHow. Accessed July 13, 2011. www.ehow.com.

Edited for content July 13, 2011 by Duarte, A., CT Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.