

What to Know When Layoffs Hit Your Workplace



Basics of Layoff Process

The layoff process in Kansas State government is a technical process - that means that it doesn't necessarily lead to unemployment. When an agency needs to reduce its workforce due to: a shortage of work or funds, an employee returning from authorized leave, to abolish a position, or other material changes in organization, the agency must request approval to conduct the layoff action and identify the affected employees. Those employees receive individual counseling sessions in which options are discussed, such as: bumping other employees, transferring to vacant positions, or accepting employment in another position. Before a layoff action is effective, employees are assisted in identifying other employment options within SRS or with another employer. A formal layoff action usually results in employees transferring, demoting or taking a position with other employers.

Strong Emotional Reactions

Employees who experience layoff often go through different emotional reactions. The five listed below may not occur in this particular order. Also, a person may jump back and forth between different reactions, or not experience some of them at all. Each individual will have his/her own response to the situation. It may be beneficial to understand each of these emotional reactions, and what employees and their supervisors can do to resolve each one.

<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; display: inline-block; width: 30px; text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">1</div> <u>Numbness, Shock, Disbelief</u>	<i>What Employee can do:</i>	<i>What Supervisor can do:</i>
<p>When an employee first hears the news, he/she will often feel numbness and disbelief, or refusal to accept the news. This is a natural reaction that prevents the person from feeling overwhelmed.</p>	<p>You may feel like you were just doused with a bucket of cold water. Often it may be difficult to listen, absorb information, or even focus on the options before you. You may feel a variety of emotions, or experience a lack feeling altogether. When first receiving the bad news, you may want to do the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be sure you allow yourself time to absorb the impact of the news. • Do not make any hasty decisions. • Let your supervisor know if you simply cannot focus on what happens next, and ask to meet with him/her about options once you have had time to take this in. • Find emotional support from family, friends, or other people you trust. • Practice stress relievers: Deep breathing, exercise, meditation. Eat healthy. Follow a routine. 	<p>This is no doubt some of the hardest news to have to give to an employee. To best help the situation, you may want to do the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize the employee may experience a variety of emotional reactions, and be aware of their response to the information. • In this stage of shock, an employee may find it very difficult to listen to anything past the word "layoff." Be prepared to set up a time to meet with the employee about his/her options after the employee has had some time. Set up multiple information sessions if necessary. • Be available to listen.

<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; display: inline-block; margin-bottom: 5px;">2</div> <u>Fear and Anxiety</u>	<i>What Employee can do:</i>	<i>What Supervisor can do:</i>
<p>Often the employee will be concerned about how the bills will get paid, whether or not they will have health insurance, and how the news will impact his/her family. The employee's security is threatened, he/she may feel powerless to do anything and overwhelmed. He/she may not know what to do next.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize the fears that you have, identify them so you can find options to meet the need. • Reassess who you are and what you want. Begin making some goals. • Now you are probably ready to absorb some information about your options and listen to how the organization can help. Talk to your supervisor and HR staff. • Take things one step at a time. You do not have to handle every detail all at once. Begin a list of your needs and options. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to the employee's needs, fears and anxieties. Don't assume you already know what they are - double check to make sure you have understood their concerns accurately. • Help prevent them from feeling overwhelmed. Help him/her address these needs one at a time. • Connect the employee to resources appropriate to each need. Maintain an accurate list of these resources.
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; display: inline-block; margin-bottom: 5px;">3</div> <u>Anger and Blame</u>	<i>What Employee can do:</i>	<i>What Supervisor can do:</i>
<p>This is another normal feeling and response to a layoff. Anger can be healthy because it indicates that the employee values themselves. However, while laying blame may explain some things about why the layoff happened, but it rarely resolves anything.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge and deal with anger to help you move forward. • Dispel negative feelings and diminish stress - talk to family members, friends, or a professional. Exercise vigorously or find other healthy ways to relieve stress and anger. • Try writing to express emotions. • Focus on what options you can pursue rather than dwelling on anger and blame. • It is very difficult to listen when angry, resolve anger issues so that you can listen to the options and good ideas around you. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is often very difficult to listen when an employee is angry. Try to listen to their concerns without taking the anger personally. Recognize that an angry employee will have a very difficult time listening to you in this state. • No one should have to tolerate abusive language or behavior. Deal with such situations appropriately. • Connect the employee to professional or agency resources for dealing with anger if appropriate. • Be aware of your security procedures should safety become a concern.

<div style="border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; padding: 2px 5px; margin-right: 5px;">4</div> <u>Depression</u>	<i>What Employee can do:</i>	<i>What Supervisor can do:</i>
<p>This is a normal feeling which accompanies the loss of something, including a job. The losses an employee may experience are more than simply a paycheck, and may include the loss of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • benefits, • their role as a provider, • dignity and self-esteem, • the “American Dream,” • loss of trust, • control over one’s life, • one’s work family. <p>Experiencing some depression is a healthy part of the process, as long as the employee does not remain depressed for too long.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk to family, friends and good advisors about how you are feeling. Keep your support system. • Exercising and staying socially active will help you move through the depression. • Resist the temptation to view yourself as a victim. Take steps to create your own future. • Recognize these losses are real and painful, but make plans for your future. • Utilize resources and/or professional assistance if the depression lingers or is too much to handle. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize that these losses are real and painful for the employee. • Supervisors are dealing with losses of their own, including the loss of these co-workers. Be sure to recognize your own sense of loss and manage any feelings of depression you may have. • Help the employee take steps to plan his/her future. • Connect the employee to professional or agency resources for dealing with depression if appropriate.

<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; display: inline-block; width: 30px; height: 30px; text-align: center; line-height: 30px; font-weight: bold; margin-right: 5px;">5</div> Acceptance and Exploration	<i>What Employee can do:</i>	<i>What Supervisor can do:</i>
<p>This is a positive reaction involving accepting yourself and exploring your opportunities. Employees can begin to clarify goals and take action.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a positive outlook. The situation may be an opportunity to change something you had been thinking about changing - such as a career track, location, etc. • Assess your personal values and goals. Explore opportunities for change that line up with those values and goals. • Explore your passion, take time to understand yourself. You may consider taking a survival job while pursuing your dream. • Take advantage of the resources available to you in the agency. • Network with people you know to explore job possibilities. • Use this time to develop new skills to increase your marketability. Agency resources include ways to assist with skill assessment and development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the employee in the exploration process. Connect him/her with skill development resources. • Offer assistance in networking, job searching, or writing a good letter of recommendation.

References: Research of Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, *Death and Dying - Five Grief Stages*, (1970, Collier Books).
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 Overcoming the job loss blues, C.B. Bowman, www.careerjournal.com/jobhunting/jobloss/19971231bowman.html
 Alaska Department of Labor, Surviving a layoff, www.jobs.state.ak.us/taa/survive.htm