

# How to Recover from a Career Crisis

If you have ever experienced any of the following, you have had a career crisis:

- Losing your job
- Being fired
- Burning out
- Not wanting to do your job for one more day

A career crisis can be caused either by someone else (being laid off) or by your own feelings (burning out).

## Common Causes of Career Crises

There are many reasons why people experience career crises. Here are a few:

- Corporate downsizing
- Burnout
- Relocating for your spouse's career
- Being fired
- Making the wrong career move
- Corporate politics
- Not fitting in

## Why a Career Crisis Is So Devastating

A career crisis is almost always devastating because it can impact your life in so many ways. Here are a few examples:

1. **Money:** Losing your income with no warning can be financially devastating.
2. **Status:** If your job gives you status or a professional identity, you may feel devastated without it.
3. **Surprise:** If the job loss happens without warning, you will probably feel shocked.
4. **Self-esteem:** You may feel embarrassed by what has happened.
5. **Feeling alone:** You are likely to lose friends and companions when you no longer work in the same place.
6. **Feeling out of synch:** Your regular routine may be disrupted.
7. **Confusion:** If the crisis happens because of burnout or for reasons inside yourself, you may feel confused about what to do next.
8. **Effect on others:** If people around you depend on your income and need you to be predictable, they may react negatively to your crisis.

## **Career Crisis: Who It Hurts the Most**

A career crisis hurts *you* because it is devastating to your ego. The hurt tends to be greater when one gets a sense of identity and self-esteem from his or her job title, status, and income.

A crisis hurts *your family* because they must experience the emotional fallout that follows a crisis. Your family may also experience a feeling of lost self-esteem and status, especially if you were fired or laid off.

## **The Flashback Effect**

A major loss like this sometimes can cause you to reach back into the past and reactivate unfinished business from a major loss, or a crisis from an earlier time.

For example, when Sharon was terminated after seven months at her dream job, she became very depressed. While depression is a normal reaction to such a loss, Sharon was reacting to losing her job *and* the similar feelings she had when she flunked out of a top university 12 years earlier. When she finally saw a therapist after a few weeks of depression following the job loss, she saw that she had never fully resolved her feelings about failing in college.

Here are some other points about recovery:

1. The process of recovering from a career crisis will happen on its own schedule. It can't be rushed.
2. Every person responds to a career crisis differently. There is no right way to respond or to deal with it.
3. Depending on the circumstances, processing a career crisis can take years.
4. Build and use a support system. People need other people when they are experiencing such a crisis. A group of people who have experienced similar losses is especially helpful.
5. It is a good idea to find support outside of your family and friends. Even the most supportive may grow tired of hearing about your situation, or you may find yourself censoring your behavior to avoid alienating them. However, you still need help and a place to let your feelings out.

## **How to Help Someone in a Career Crisis**

Here are a few ideas for being helpful to people going through career crises:

1. People need support when they are having a career crisis, even though they may seem to push you away.
2. Ask how you can help.
3. Don't give advice unless asked.
4. Check in regularly with the crisis victim; let him or her know you're there.
5. Remind the crisis victim of what a good person he or she is, even without the identity and status that the job provided.
6. Sometimes a career crisis sends a person into a serious depression for which help is needed. If you sense danger, urge the crisis victim to seek help.

## **How to Turn a Crisis into a Victory**

Here are some suggestions for turning a career crisis into a victory:

1. Give yourself time to heal. If recovery is rushed or interrupted, the crisis victim will not fully heal and a victory is not possible.
2. Remind yourself as often as necessary that your pain will end and you will eventually feel happy again.
3. Avoid jumping into something new on the rebound; let yourself experience all the stages of grief.
4. Accept that many people will not understand the depth of your grief. They will not understand why this is so difficult for you, and they will say stupid things.
5. Use the opportunity to stop and consider other options.
6. Explore what meaning your feelings have for you. If we pay attention to them, our feelings can lead us places we would otherwise never visit.
7. Keep a journal of your experiences. Make it your intention to see what there is to be learned from this experience.
8. A loss such as a career crisis can be viewed as both a door-closer and a door-opener. Start to think about what you are learning and gaining from this experience.
9. Create a ceremony of letting go. Yours will be as unique as your experience.

## **The Career Crisis Recovery Exercise**

Write out your answers to the following questions. This self-help exercise can help you process your feelings about what has happened to you.

1. Describe what happened when your career crisis happened.
2. Describe the job or career. Where did you work? What was it like? Who did you work with? What do you miss the most? What do you not miss at all?
3. Describe your feelings about the loss of the job or career.
4. What has the impact of this crisis been on your life? What else have you lost because of your career crisis?
5. What barriers stop you from moving on?
6. What are 10 things you can do starting today to continue the recovery process?