



## ARE YOU SUFFERING FROM SURVIVOR'S REMORSE?

*Marilyn Moats Kennedy MSJ*

The company did have too many employees. Expenses were out of control. The CEO was managerially deficient and both she and the CFO were fired. Ten percent of the employees were laid off but you're still on the payroll. The organization is probably stronger because of the cuts. You were given a new assignment and a six percent bonus to motivate you to work with renewed energy. Despite brightening prospects, you have updated your resume. If only the job market was better...

Why do some people who survive a downsizing regret they didn't get offered severance instead? We talked with clients who've been through multiple cuts and they tell us that once you're mentally geared up to lose your

job, not losing it can actually be stressful. All that energy expended and you're still there. Some clients report that it took a full three months to get back to work as usual.

Change – a.k.a. downsizing; a layoff – is painful even when it's necessary and humanely executed. And for those who are change-averse,

it does help to realize that change is inevitable. It's surprising how many layoff survivors seriously contemplate their own departures. Here are some of the most common reasons for survivor's remorse.

**In the past 25 years...we've learned that, once the initial shock passed, many laid-off people are actually glad**

### **Increased workload**

A layoff doesn't necessarily mean there were too many people employed. It may mean the company needed to cut costs and now expects the survivors to work harder to pick up the slack – for the same money, of course. This has caused legions to polish their resumes. Unfortunately, asking for severance when none has been offered can be risky. Organizations often turn down those requests and punish the perp with isolation or undesirable assignments.

### **Adjustment to a new order**

You kept your job but is it the same job? You may need new skills or be asked to reprise old ones. Sometimes the culture changes dramatically. The most upsetting can be the loss of working relationships. The loss of co-workers often changes the way people do their jobs. It can also diminish job satisfaction. Both are important considerations which can affect anyone's outlook. Are relationships a factor in how you do your job? If you were part of a functioning team, has the loss of team members affected productivity? Most important, must you adjust to a new boss? Both can produce bit-time stress.

### **Self-doubt**

Having to acknowledge that people you worked closely with were redundant or unproductive starts most people thinking about what else wasn't working before the cuts were made. They may even have to confront the painful knowledge that the job they do is not absolutely necessary, even if they do that job well. That kind of knowledge is crucial to your future even though it's not good for your mental health. If there is a job hunt in your future, shouldn't you recognize it now?

### **Loss of faith in management**

Even the most cynical worker has a modicum of faith that top management knows more about how to run the business than the worker does. When employees see the CEO stumbling and bumbling and making obviously poor decisions they become suspicious that no one at the organization knows how to run it. For instance, if one of those laid off was a manager you knew was ineffective but had been tolerated by top management for years, the change can be especially stressful. The question is always, "Why now? Are things that bad?" having backed the wrong team doesn't make survivors happy. They must be first out the door even before the layoff process is complete. (The cynics among the survivors may be tempted to point out the problems. This is dangerous. Top management doesn't reward the loyal opposition, it punishes the messengers.) *continued on next page*



**"There's no time for strategic decisions.  
It's time for strategic excuses."**

## Guilt

The fear that former co-workers really weren't that highly skilled and may be unemployed for months or years haunts those still on the payroll. "There but the grace of God, go I" becomes a mantra. Stop feeling guilty. Some of those people were undoubtedly relieved to get out. In the past 25 years of downsizings, right-sizings, and just plain dumpings we've learned that, once the initial shock passed, many of the people laid off were glad. The jobs weren't right for them – maybe hadn't been right for years – but they either lacked the resolve to leave or were hoping for a payoff on the way out. They'll job hunt with new energy and purpose.

## Unsettled organizational politics

Power relationships are always disrupted after a layoff and a scramble to adjust them ensues. Long-term employees, who generally set the rules of what's politically acceptable, may be gone – or at least fewer in number – giving newer players chances to power grab if they care to.

Many survivors are too preoccupied with their own issues to notice that a redistribution of power is taking place. If you're not planning on hanging around long, you may not care. If you are, you can't afford to ignore who's becoming more powerful and who less so. For example, the CEO and the CFO were canned. They had worked together for years and could read each other's minds. The newly hired CEO may delegate a search firm to find a new CFO but will bring in one of his old pals to head marketing. Result: The entire finance department will be diminished and marketing will be enhanced because of the CEO's preferences. If you were in either department you'd need to know that before you made a stay/go decision.

## Loss of respect for the organization

Public perceptions, especially press coverage of how – and why – the downsizing took place, can have an outside effect on worker morale. Of course Enron employees felt shame and anger at what top management had done to the shareholders (not to mention their own employees). Ditto, other companies whose top management is under federal indictment. But it doesn't have to be nearly that public to cause survivor's remorse. Plenty of CEOs in not-for-profits have been indicted for mismanaging funds, a fact which the Board will try to keep under wraps for fear of donors jumping ship. When a layoff occurs (as it inevitably does) in order to allow the organization to lick its wounds and reorganize – it's not only morale that's affected, but anger at the exploitation of the worker's commitment to the cause, or in case of a for-profit, abuse of worker loyalty. At the first opportunity, the formerly-faithful will leave.

Employee perceptions of layoffs have changed since the almost universal application of severance. There are still small organizations who lay people off without a package but most don't because so much of the workforce is now over 40. Getting these people to sign a release agreeing not to sue for age discrimination – or to tell the truth about what happened – means paying people off. That leaves the survivors wondering: Were the laid off actually fired for cause? Are the survivors all competent or just lucky? The suspicion is often the latter and that fact further contributes to survivors' anxiety.

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**CIRCLE READER ACTION CARD # 15**

*Measuring BMR.. Continued from page 33*

Measurements involve a system in which the patient is breathing through a mouthpiece and valve attached to volume displacement spirometer or to a Douglas bag filled with 100% oxygen. Any volume decrease will be the result of oxygen consumed or VO<sub>2</sub>. The VE can be measured at the same time by means of pneumotachograph. A CO<sub>2</sub> scrubbing device must be made part of the breathing circuit so that CO<sub>2</sub> will not build within the closed system. The scrubbing device contains a compound such as soda lime which binds the CO<sub>2</sub> out of the system.

Open circuit technique involves the patient breathing through a pneumotachograph for volume measurement with an end tidal catheter attached, leading to one of the "off the shelf" metabolic systems which measure VO<sub>2</sub>, VCO<sub>2</sub>, and VE. These systems invariably advertise themselves as making use of "breath by breath" analysis but you will notice that they average ten second segments of data for final display and graphing since sighs or single deep breaths cause huge peaks in apparent VO<sub>2</sub>. Although these peaks seem to accurately represent metabolism at the end tidal level, they in no way represent accuracy in the cellular level, even during steady state. If the device allows, it is best to report data from a ten second average once steady state is established.

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