



Forty and Fired:  
A Guide to Picking Up the Pieces and  
Moving On

It's the middle-age nightmare: you're fortysomething and suddenly fired. It wasn't like a plant-closing, so you didn't see it coming. The boss just called you in one Friday, said your division was being sliced in half, and you're out. Now what?

"What's the first thing you should do? Take a deep breath, put your mind on hold for a while, and then don't do anything at all, at least for a couple of days," advises Leanne Bradshaw-Daniels, a counselor in the Washington, D.C., office of Drake Beam Morin, the worldwide outplacement firm. "Just let it be."

Then, take a moment to consider that a similar fate has befallen millions of other middle-aged workers, particularly in this era of relentless down sizing. Unemployment in the forty-plus set is the "great equalizer," says J. Damian Birkel in his book Career Bounceback, a guide for career transitions.

According to Birkel, workers out of a job suddenly endure the same kind of emotions as losing a beloved relative or friend. They go through shock, denial, fear, anger, depression, and, finally, acceptance. One way of coping with these emotions is to mobilize your support system--family, close friends and trusted colleagues.

After you've begun to accept your fate, says Bradshaw-Daniels, the next step is to realize that "there is no magic, immediate fix" for this situation. Many newly displaced workers want to race right back out into the job market, certain they'll land a new job in a matter of weeks or even days. That's a big mistake, she says, and one that will almost certainly set you up for a fall.

"You just have to take it one day at a time, and realize that finding a new job, especially in mid-career, is like a campaign."

Another mistake: immediately rewriting your resume, faxing it out and calling everyone you know. Even worse: Calling a lawyer in an effort to threaten some kind of revenge. That, warns Bradshaw-Daniels, only saps your energy, as does calling up friends and family in an effort to portray yourself as victim.

"You need to approach this job search deliberately and carefully, particularly at this vital mid-career point," she says. "You can't really afford a big mistake here."

What is key at this stage, experts counsel, is taking a series of small, practical steps that will put you on the right path toward that next job. Maintain good work habits by rising every morning, just as you did before. Don't procrastinate by painting every room in the house. At this point, says Bradshaw-Daniels, you may want to reach out for counseling or the kind of impartial, professional advice offered by a search firm.

In her book, Mid-Career Job-Hunting: Official Handbook of the Forty Plus Club, E. Patricia Birsner offers these initial steps that should be taken in the wake of a job loss:

1. Apply for unemployment benefits
2. Write a preliminary resume
3. Review your financial obligations and finances
4. Discuss your situation with fully and honestly with your family
5. Get personal stationery printed
6. Locate a computer you can use if you don't already have one at home

Above all, say the experts, do anything and everything you can to avoid wallowing in despair and bitterness.

"One door shuts, but another eventually will open," says Bradshaw-Daniels. "It will take some work and patience, but one day, whether it's in a few weeks or a few months, you'll get up, the sun will be shining, and you'll be on your way."