

# FINDING THE WORDS

## The Day of Your Termination

### *Give yourself a moment.*

You've just lost your job. You have no words. You haven't even fully processed what just happened yet... and you need to let your loved ones know why you are home early, or why you are not going to work tomorrow. Deep breath, you have time.

Give yourself compassion. Job loss is one of the three most stressful "life" events you will ever experience, and that deserves a moment to let you catch up to yourself.

### *Finding your words.*

Who needs to know right now? Not everyone needs to know what has just happened, but there will be one person, or two people at most, with whom you should speak in the next few hours (like a spouse, best friend or a parent).

Focus on the first person with whom you need to share this news, and what you want to say to them - it doesn't have to be a lot of words:

***"I need to tell you that I've just been laid off. Today was my last day at work and I need you to help me stay calm while I figure this out."***

***"Honey, today I was let go from work. I have a package, with some financial support, and right now I need your support to process what just happened."***

### *Know that your words have been heard.*

Your loved ones care deeply for you, and while they too may be upset by this event, they are a part of your comfort and emotional support system. Know, employment loss does not change who you are, or how much you are loved.

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## Working Notification

### *Staying on after you've been let go.*

Your employer may terminate your role, but have you continue to work for a few days, weeks or months to allow for transition of work, or the close of a project, etc. On the one hand, this gives you more income. On the other hand your change in status will need to be announced before your last day.

Once you've had time to process your termination and working notice, understand what the communication plan is with respect to this change.

### *Finding your words.*

If you need more time before the announcement is made, then ask for it: *"I appreciate that this is time sensitive, but if it is possible, could you give me a day to get my head wrapped around this change, so I am ready to handle the questions and concerns that will come?"*

Once the announcement is made, in addition to sharing this with your loved ones, you need to have a response ready for your colleagues, coworkers and other parties that may reach out:

***"I appreciate your kind words. This is still really new, and I'll need some time to work through it. Thanks for your understanding."***

***"This was not the outcome I wanted, but I understand why it has happened. I'm committed to completing this work and I appreciate your support over the next few days/weeks."***

### *Know that your words have been heard.*

Your work community will be concerned by your termination, offering condolences and support that you may not be ready to receive. Be as open and gracious as possible, they are doing their best in a trying circumstance. Continuing to ask for what you need (including more time before you talk about it) allows your exit to be dignified and graceful.

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## Responding to Colleagues & Work Contacts

*Wait until you are ready.*

Within minutes, or hours, of your termination your coworkers will know what has happened and they may reach out. You do not have to respond immediately to their calls, e-mails or texts (however well-meaning they may be) until you are ready.

What you may want to consider is an acknowledgment of their care/concern that gives you time before you re-connected with them.

*Finding your words.*

Recognising their kindness is a smart move, but you don't have to respond immediately; wait 24-48 hours before acknowledging their concern. You choose what works best for you. If a co-worker called you and left a voice-mail, you can e-mail them back to acknowledge you received their message.

In time you will have the words to discuss what happened, but for now all that is needed is an acknowledgement to keep this person open to your future needs (like referrals and references):

***"I appreciate your reaching out to me. I haven't had time to process all of this yet and appreciate your patience while I do. I will be in touch."***

***"Thanks for your e-mail. This was completely unexpected, and I'll need time to process this. I look forward to reaching out when I've had time to do that."***

*Know that your words have been heard.*

Some members of your work community will reach out with concern and care, and others may not (that doesn't mean they don't care, they just may not have the words), Take the time you need before engaging people from work. By acknowledging their kindness you'll have open doors later, when you need them.

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## Widening The Circle of People Who Know

### *Give yourself time.*

Within the first days and weeks of being unemployed, be prepared to share your employment status with others, like friends, other family, and neighbours; sometimes because they ask a common conversation starter (“*How is work going?*”), or they heard about the lay-offs on the news.

You choose who and when to talk about your change in circumstance. Be prepared for the questions of the curious (“*Hey, are you working from home now? I notice you’re around a lot more during the day...*”), and the kindness of people who care about you (“*You seem down today, are you OK?*”).

### *Finding your words.*

For those who don’t need to know, you can politely deflect: “*Work is fine. How are you doing?*”, “*I am working from home more these days. How are you?*”, “*I am a little off today, I probably need to go to bed earlier tonight.*”

There are those people in your life who need to know, or deserve to know, about your status change – these are the people who will be hurt if you don’t share this with them. Know the longer you put off telling them, the more awkward (or hurtful) it may be for both of you. Consider who these people are in your life and be prepared to share your status change.

***“Listen, I want to let you know I’m no longer working, it was a shock and I’m adjusting to it, and I appreciate your support while I figure this out.”***

***“I was laid off of work last week. I have a bit of a package which gives me some time to think about my next steps, but I’m not ready to talk about it just yet.”***

### *Know that your words have been heard.*

Your wider community cares about you, and while that care may feel intrusive, be prepared to respond to it. Friends and family mean well, but that doesn’t ensure they know the best thing to say to you in this moment. Be compassionate, with yourself first, and then with this wider community.

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## Responding to Interviewer Questions

### *Be prepared.*

There is no avoiding the question “*Why did you leave your last job?*” in an interview, whether it shows up in the phone screen, at the live interview, or both.

You are an abundance of potential and that needs to shine through your answer to this question.

### *Finding your words.*

While stressful, this question does not need a long or complicated answer. If at some point in your work history you left an employer voluntarily, then explaining that builds a positive picture (“*I was offered a position at a competing firm...*”, “*I was ready for more responsibility, so I found a new position that better reflected my skills and experience...*”).

When you are unemployed, your response needs to have the same positive over-tones, while being matter-of-fact about the things you could not control, providing as much context as is appropriate:

***“My previous manager had to reduce the team. As a result they let go of 20 people, choosing to focus their remaining resources on urgent, rather than emerging, priorities.”***

***“The company where I worked was bought-out, and my role was made redundant as they already had this function well resourced through the acquiring company.”***

***“My last role offered me fantastic skill-building opportunities. However, our whole team was laid-off when they chose to out-source this function to a third-party provider.”***

***“I was laid-off when the organization I worked for closed its doors. I have the utmost respect for the people I worked with and the work we did – it was a very difficult decision for them.”***

### *Know that your words have been heard.*

There isn't an employed person in North America who hasn't been touched (directly or indirectly) by lay-offs and termination, and this includes your interviewers. As long as you are confident, calm and positive about your previous employer (and the experience you gained there), the interview will move on to questions that more deeply explore your professional experience.

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Figuring out what you would like to say

## Move gently.

Before moving into completing this worksheet, consider the following:

- How are you relating to where you are in your career transition right now (i.e. confused, hurt, open, curious, etc.)?
- What is your response/reaction to having to find words to position your job loss to others (i.e. are you accepting of this, or resisting it)?
- Given what is going on for you in this moment, what's a wise and kind way to respond to yourself right now? Be open to what occurs to you and follow your advice.

Adapted from: Unshakable Confidence by Mare Chapman, page 68

## Find your words.

Consider the following writing prompts, and sketch answers for yourself so you will have the words when you need them.

Being your best self, how would you like to respond to...

- a direct question about your employment status?
- the curiosity of others about your work?
- care and concern from a loved one?
- care and concern from a colleague or work contact?
- the interview question "Why did you leave your last employer?"

When you are done for today, pause to recognize, and celebrate, what you have given yourself in doing this work.