

# Bouncing Back After Being Laid Off

**Pink (slips) are the new black.**

The unemployment rate hovers at 6.1% and, during September, employers cut a higher-than-expected 159,000 jobs, according to the latest report from the Labor Department. Not only is that more than double the layoffs during either July or August, but it's also the worst decline since 2003, when the economy was still in the throes of a recession.

"It's a further sign -- certainly not the first -- that nobody is guaranteed a paycheck," says Tory Johnson, CEO of *Women for Hire*<sup>1</sup>, a career web site. "Everyone needs to wonder, 'What about me? Am I next?'"

Things will get worse before they get better, predicts Richard Ebeling, a senior research fellow with think tank American Institute of Economic Research. Many of the recent job losses stem from the embattled financial sector. The spending habits of Wall Street's elite, especially come annual bonus time, typically result in widespread booms in the retail, housing, tourism and hospitality industries. Now that tens of thousands of financial-services employees are out of work and bonuses have been slashed, those sectors will undoubtedly take a hit, he says.

Eventually, the job market will bounce back. "Cycles bottom out and recover," says Ebeling. "In a sense, jobs changing, letting people go, and re-working wages indicates a healing process."

But of course, the pain comes first and job hunters currently face a tough environment with fewer job openings and plenty of competition. Should you get laid off, here's how to keep your wits about you, and get back on track:

## Bullet-proof your job

Those still employed ought to assess their risk of being laid off. "Pay attention to headlines about your industry, and the financial health of your company," suggests Johnson. Do what you can to stay visible. Speak up at meetings, volunteer for committees and work extra hours if need be to make sure everything gets done. Indispensable employees rarely end up on the cut list, she says.

Have a sinking feeling that the ax is about to come down? "Get a fast start on your search," suggests John Challenger, CEO of outplacement firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas. Try to bolster your finances and jump to a more stable company before the pink slips arrive.

## Negotiate severance

Employers typically base this farewell package on how long an employee has worked at the company. But no matter how long you've been employed there, it can't hurt to ask for more. Some employers may include unused sick or vacation days; others provide extended health-care coverage, says Challenger. Talk to a financial advisor or tax preparer about whether to take the package as a lump sum or in several spread-out payments. (For more negotiation tactics and other advice, [click here](#)<sup>2</sup>.)

## Get your finances in order

Ideally, you won't be unemployed for long, but prepare your finances as if you're in for a lengthy search. "You need to make sure your money lasts," says Challenger. Sign up for unemployment benefits right away to limit the lag between your last paycheck and your first unemployment check, and start looking for affordable health-care options. (For a checklist of financial do's and don'ts for the unemployed, [click here](#)<sup>3</sup>.)

## Brush up on your job-search skills

If you've been out of the job market for years, take a refresher course in resume writing and interviewing skills, suggests Johnson. Seek out such resources on career sites like *Monster.com*<sup>4</sup> and *Vault.com*<sup>5</sup>, or head to government-run *CareerOneStop.org*<sup>6</sup>, which offers advice and connections to local career-focused groups for job hunters. (For more low-cost resources, [click here](#)<sup>7</sup>.)

## Network

More than 40% of job seekers found their current position through someone they know in the industry, according to a survey from human resources consultant Right Management. "People hire people, and your goal is to get in front of as many people as you can," says Johnson. Let your family, friends and business contacts know you're looking, and post your profile on networking sites

## Grab part-time opportunities

The number of workers employed part-time jumped to 1.5 million in September, up 275% from last year, according to the Labor Department. The lesson? Don't sneer at part-time, freelance or consulting work -- it's all many job hunters can find, warns Johnson. "People will say, 'I need benefits. I can't afford to work part-time,'" she says. "But you also need cash to pay the rent. It's not about settling, it's about being realistic to make ends meet in the short term."

## Expand your hunt

While there may be plenty of jobs listed on online job boards, make sure to expand your search by sending your resume to companies you'd like to work for and requesting informational interviews. "Applying online gives you a false sense of accomplishment, getting in 30 applications a day," says Johnson. "You need to have a lot of sticks in the fire. It's not enough to have one or two leads." Also, consider how your skills apply in other sectors, says Challenger. A financial accountant or salesman could easily apply his skills in a variety of industries. And don't be afraid to look beyond your current market. (View our slideshow on the five most employee-hungry ~~hires~~.)

<sup>1</sup><http://www.womenforhire.com>

<sup>2</sup><http://www.smartmoney.com/deal-of-the-day/index.cfm?story=How-to-Best-Cope-With-Being-Laid-Off>

<sup>3</sup><http://www.smartmoney.com/deal-of-the-day/index.cfm?story=20080619-severance-survival-kit>

<sup>4</sup><http://www.monster.com>

<sup>5</sup><http://www.vault.com>

<sup>6</sup><http://www.careeronestop.org/>

<sup>7</sup><http://www.smartmoney.com/deal-of-the-day/index.cfm?story=20080619-severance-survival-kit>

<sup>8</sup><http://www.linkedin.com>

<sup>9</sup><http://www.smartmoney.com/deal-of-the-day/index.cfm?story=Five-Best-Cities-for-Job-Hunting>

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