



## **The Job-Loss Grief Stages**

### **The “Pre-termination” Phase**

#### ***Stage One: Denial***

When a person is first informed that their employment is going to end, their first response is a stunned “this can’t be happening to me.” This stage may last only a few minutes, or it can last for weeks. Sometimes the person becomes convinced that management will change their minds because that has happened before.

#### ***Stage Two: Anger***

After the person comes to the realization that they are really going to lose their job, they get angry. The anger is usually toward the company or the management, but often it is directed elsewhere. It is not uncommon for people to take their anger out on family or friends.

#### ***Stage Three: Bargaining***

Not everyone appears to go through this stage, but at least some do. Usually, the bargaining is something like asking God to intervene in the operation of the company, or promising God all sorts of things in return for another job.

#### ***Stage Four: Depression***

When it becomes obvious that termination is inevitable, depression sets in. The depression may be mild and allow the person to go on to the next stage, or it may be severe enough to inhibit normal functioning. Even when one successfully goes on to Stage Five, recurring bouts with depression are not uncommon.

#### ***Stage Five: Acceptance, or Getting On With Life***

One may enter this stage before depression has completely ended. In fact, it is common for people to have to continually work to fight depression if it looks like job prospects are bleak. Those who have the most success in this stage are those who learn to manage their attitudes. They realize that success is usually the result of applying a positive attitude to keep trying, exploring alternatives, and building networks.

## **The “Terminated” Phase**

### ***Stage One: Numbness***

Whether you have gone through a “pre-termination” phase or not, you still experience some degree of numbness and disbelief that you have actually lost your job. This may explain why some people at first act as if they think they can continue their same lifestyle on unemployment benefits.

### ***Stage Two: Yearning***

Once a person has gone through the numbness stage, they often get “homesick” for the old job. Even if they didn’t like their job, they may still miss the people, the routine, etc. This stage will also usually include anger toward the company or specific people, particularly if there was little or no transition period.

### ***Stage Three: Disorganization and Despair***

The person comes to terms with the job loss, but cannot seem to get on with life. They procrastinate about trying to find another job, partly out of fear of failure and partly out of embarrassment from being jobless. When they do begin, it is often a haphazard effort. They often become depressed.

### ***Stage Four: Reorganization of Behavior***

The person finally realizes that in order to possibly return to the quality of life they had before, they must make some changes in their life. They no longer blame anyone for the past. Instead, they focus on the future and its possibilities. They begin to plan rather than daydream. Then they act based on the plan. They develop a support network which includes family, friends, mentors, and job contacts. When they become discouraged, they then can avoid reverting back to stage three.

If a person has been able to go through an adequate and effective “pre-termination” phase, they can often minimize stages two and three of the “terminated” phase. This is particularly the case when they have been able to take advantage of support services or develop their own support group during the earlier phase.

Just as with other types of grief, a person with job-loss grief has three basic choices. They can stay at the same point and fixate, they can regress, or they can progress and go on to the next stage of living. Understanding the job-loss grief process can help them to get on to that next stage in a healthy and productive way.

*Note: The stages of the “Pre-termination” Phase were based on the stages of grief identified by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross for those facing their own death. The stages of the “Terminated” Phase were based on C.M. Parkes’ stages of grief for those who have lost loved ones.*