What to Do if You Get Laid Off — Practical Advice for Cancer Survivors

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July 6, 2018 By Lisa Vento Nielsen

Many cancer patients and survivors are laid off (or fired). This post is not about the legality of said employer decision but instead about how to manage being laid off and how to consider getting back to work, if and when you are able to do so. Always check with your doctor regarding whether you are fit for work.

One of the main differences between being fired and laid off is just the wording and in what it means for you to look for a new role. No matter what, though, it results in the loss of your job and for us who have already lost so much during this life changing diagnosis, this is just what can be the straw that breaks the camel's back.

You go from being employed — and for most of us that means having a purpose and a routine — to losing that footing in the world, which makes recovery and our sense of selves suffer. It is a challenge to "bounce back" from cancer and now you need to find a job. To deal with a layoff and cancer treatment, it is important to be flexible.

Now when you are told that your position is gone, the first thing you will do is feel angry, lost and maybe even ashamed (I did) but you need to take a deep breath and consider some strategies to get as much as you can out of your previous employer.

Some things you can negotiate for* include:

- severance payments
- lump sum payment
- career counseling or some other back end training and/or help for your next step

*Do not sign anything, though, without legal review.

If those options do not lead to anything, look into short-term disability through your state or unemployment benefits. Check with Human Resources or a local lawyer about your options.

No matter that you got “laid off” — it is more important to move past it as soon as possible and begin planning on taking your next step. It can be tempting to take the decision made by the company too hard on top of your recent diagnosis and/or treatment. This can lead to you feeling depressed and that is the worst thing for healing. Try to think of this as a chance to start over someplace new or somehow find a better position.

Consider retraining and re-framing your skills by:

- training on a new skill
- attending seminars for networking and knowledge
- volunteering to keep busy and active

Also, you can look at this time as a chance to heal and recover for as long as you can — we all have bills to pay, though, and working is a huge part of our identities. See more articles here about getting back to work after cancer.

If you like this article, check out thetimebetweenis.org for more information and resources for your career after cancer.

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Lisa Vento Nielsen, MBA, PMP is an author, speaker, cancer survivor and career expert. She lost her job during treatment and founded a nonprofit focused on helping people who have been diagnosed with cancer (and their families) find meaningful work. Cancer takes a toll on your whole life and the lives of those in your family — working is a big part of getting back to “normal” after going through a cancer diagnosis. Survivorship is all that comes after diagnosis and it needed more resources so Lisa and her team created them. Find out more at lisaventonielsen.com.

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