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Top tips for staying motivated and finding a job after a layoff

Rather than sit around feeling badly after a layoff, it's vital to remain upbeat and start job hunting right away. Here are some great tips on powerful actions you could take.

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by **Michelle MacLeod**

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The recession is forcing companies across Canada to do something they find most distasteful -- lay off staff just to keep the lights on.

In February, the national unemployment rate hit 7.7 per cent with 82,600 jobs lost last month alone, according to Statistics Canada.

If you were one of those let go, your first reaction may have been devastation, and a numbing inability to do anything more strenuous than sitting around the house feeling sorry for yourself.

While giving yourself a few days to get over a job loss may be necessary, many [career coaches](#) say it's crucial to use the momentum of a lay off to start job hunting as soon as possible.

That's the strategy 28-year-old Michael Goldberg from Toronto has taken, who less than two weeks after being laid off, started networking, found a part-time internship to update his skills and is working on his own business idea.

Goldberg had been working at CP 24 for three-and-a-half years when he received the bad news in the form of a thank you, a severance package, and a good-bye.

The technology the station was using had been updated and his position of on-air graphics operator was no longer needed.

Keep mourning to a minimum

"I was shocked," he said. "A part of me still asks *'did that really happen?'* It was weird waking up for the first few days, because I felt like I should be going to work."

Rather than take any days off, which he says "would've been one of the worst mistakes," Goldberg contacted an old colleague from the news channel who runs [Butterscotch.com](#), a beta site that teaches people how to do more with technology.

Andy Walker, the site's founder, offered him a part-time internship.

The internship allows Goldberg to go into the office a few days a week, help out on a few projects and learn new skills. The part-time hours also enable him to continue to hunting for a job, and to network with potential employers.

Besides the internship, Goldberg is also working on launching his own graphics design company, [Graphical Productions](#), which offers consulting and project-based graphic design work.

"I personally believe it's best if you can find something you can throw yourself into right away," he said. "Even if it's

just interning, because the severance package puts you in a nice position to spend time doing something you love and pursuing a new career path."

Debra Forman, certified executive coach and owner of [Pinstripe Coaching](#), endorses Goldberg's approach.

Her advice: Keep the mourning period to a minimum.

"It's so easy for people with packages to sit there and say tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow. But they need to use that fire in their belly and get the rhythm going right away to maintain focus."

In the interim, laid-off tech professionals should consider re-training, sprucing up their skills or volunteering.

The last option may help them discover whether they should remain in the IT field or move to another industry she said.

See related stories: [Eight strategies for an effective and satisfying job search](#) and [Five tips on conducting an effective job search online](#)

Tapping the "hidden" job market

An IT professional has many skills that could be used in other areas, but first he or she should determine where they really want to be and where the jobs are.

It's important to reconnect with others immediately through various channels, including social networking sites, such as [LinkedIn](#), she said.

"Every time you walk out of the house or log on to the computer, you should be connecting with people. Every person you speak with could represent an opportunity."

Networking lets you penetrate the "hidden job market", according to Igor Abramovitch, division director, consulting services at Robert Half Technology in Toronto.

Many jobs are listed on job boards, so don't ignore them, he said, but that's also where most of the competition is.

A more successful route involves engaging with trade associations or recruiting firms that may have an inside scoop on jobs that aren't advertised.

Improving your résumé is also a good strategy as it's key to getting your foot in the door, Abramovitch said.

Companies seem to be taking a much more selective approach to who they hire.

Abramovitch says it's trend Robert Half is seeing a lot these days.

In particular, they're looking for business skills on top of IT skills, he said. So emphasizing your communications or customer service expertise, improves your chances of landing a job in the IT field.

Highlight your accomplishments

[Creating a résumé](#) that focuses on your accomplishments will also heighten your chances of getting hired, says another Canadian expert.

For instance, a résumé that lists programs you designed and installed, how you saved the company money, or how you streamlined processes - can portray you as a consistent performer, noted Martin Buckland, principal, [Elite Résumés](#).

The Oakville, Ont.-based firm provides career management service for executives.

List companies you want to work for and market yourself to people there who are a rung higher than you on the corporate ladder, recommends Buckland.

For instance, a senior IT worker may target the chief technology officer.

A little ingenuity will help job hunters discover who those people are.

Buckland recommends calling the executive office, saying you want to send the company a business plan and need to find out who is in charge of IT.

"Don't mention the word *résumé* or they'll just pass you off to HR," he said.

The cover letter is just as crucial.

Addressing pain points

Buckland recommends writing a "pain resume," which identifies the pain points a company may be facing, which you will uncover through research, and lists the ways your skills might solve those problems.

"You are a solution provider, that's all you are to a company, for however long they want to have you around. It's really sad to say it, but there isn't really loyalty in a company anymore."

The cover letter, he said, should never portray desperation in any way. Along those lines, it is not recommended to apply for jobs too far below your qualifications.

"If your budget allows you to come down a bit, come down. But don't do it too much, or it will damage your career when the economy picks up again and you return to job hunting."

Sending your application directly to top management and networking will provide access to 70 to 75 per cent of jobs in Canada, Buckland said. Only 10 per cent of jobs will be found on job boards or print media.

The last strategy you could try is going through recruiters, he said. However this is becoming a less popular option as people are trying to save money and recruiters are quite expensive.

But it's one worth looking into if you can afford it.

Many severance packages also include access to a career counselor.

Lindsey Ehman was recently laid off from her position in the not-for-profit sector, but has been using access to a career counselor to not only find new work, but also change her line of work.

"The best thing my former employer did was to engage a professional job coaching firm for each of us," she said. "It's been extremely helpful, as they provide not just personal coaching, but extensive online resources, including courses we can take to upgrade skills."

Rather than stay in the not-for-profit sector, Ehman is taking professional certification courses in public relations to upgrade her education and pursue a career in government or communications - two fields which continue to hire, despite the overall slump in the economy.

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