
Stage 1: Pick yourself up

If you're like most people, after getting fired you feel naked and exposed, much like you might feel if you'd just been kicked out of a party — one your employer begged you to attend.

To recover from your employer's wrath, I recommend that you do the three tasks listed below. They can help you to recover quickly.

- Protect your vulnerabilities.
- Budget your money.
- Spend your time wisely.

Protect your vulnerabilities

When you first hear the words "You're fired!" your emotions will try to take over all your logic and cause you to spiral out of control. You might say and do things that you will later regret. Left unchecked, your emotions will quickly lead you to despair and, possibly worse, to self-destruct.

Get a grip on your emotions

Your first emotion, most likely shock, opens the floodgate for a ton of emotions: anger, disappointment, hurt pride, fear, and depression. Allowing yourself to feel any or all of these emotions is a good thing to do. It's also part of a process that you'll use later to help you regain control of your life. For now, though, try to get a grip on your emotions until you can deal with them more objectively.

Be aware that emotions are sometimes masked by hurt and bruised feelings, such as they were with my friend Betty.

When I first heard the news that Betty had been fired, I called her to ask her how she was feeling. Betty told me that she felt like someone had let out the air from all her balloons and that she was just looking at her pretty balloons lying on the floor. I could hear the sadness in her voice: Her feelings were hurt and bruised. I could sense the emotional turmoil she was in.

Betty's the most resilient person I know. So, when I asked her what she was going to do, she replied that she was first going to pick up her balloons off the floor before anyone had a chance to step all over them and then figure out what to do next.

What Betty decided to do next was to budget her money.

Budget your money

Like Betty, what you need to do next is to budget your money so it will last awhile. That means you may have to make some hard decisions about your lifestyle.

Can you afford your current lifestyle? If not, should you make some adjustments to ensure the money you have in savings and investments and from severance, retirement, or unemployment lasts longer?

What Betty did

My friend Betty used her severance package money to treat herself to a well-deserved, six-month vacation. She chose to postpone resuming her career until she *had* to go back to work.

Now, this might seem to you like a fun thing to do. It's a great escape from your troubles and responsibilities. However, before you decide to do this, be sure you'll have enough funds afterward to continue your self-support. I say that because, by the time Betty found another position (almost a year after she ended her vacation) she had nearly exhausted her life's savings.

Betty told me she was somewhat content with her new temporary data entry position, which she accepted out of pure necessity. It required less effort than her previous engineering position; however, she was also paid 65% less than her previous salary.

Additionally, Betty was concerned that if she remained in her new position for any length of time it would negatively affect both her opportunities to secure another engineering position and her Social Security earnings when she retired.

There's more to Betty's story, which you'll read about later.

After you've budgeted your money, most likely you will find that you can't afford to retire yet, especially if you're young or don't want to exhaust your life's savings. In either case you'll need to find

another means to generate some income. You'll also need to consider how you spend your time while you're unemployed.

Spend your time wisely

How much time did you spend on your job before you were fired, that is, how many hours per day — 8 hours, 10 hours? To spend your time wisely, you should spend at least 8 hours per day on whatever you decide to do to generate income. Consider the new activities you'll be spending your time on as your new full-time job. Limiting the amount of time you spend on those activities will ensure you maintain balance in your life.

You should still spend the same amount of time or more with your family and friends that you spent before you were fired and allow yourself downtime to relax.

Michael's situation

Before Michael was terminated, he was accustomed to working 10-12 hour days. This was unacceptable to his wife Charlotte, who is a homemaker, because she rarely saw her husband except on weekends. So, when Michael was terminated, Charlotte was secretly thrilled. Charlotte quickly seized the opportunity to restrict the time Michael spent on his new full-time job to an allotted 8-hour day, 8:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M., Monday through Friday, including 1 hour everyday for lunch with her.

Spend time with friends and family

You may be so lucky to have someone like Charlotte in your life. If not, you may want to consider spending more time with your friends or starting a hobby — anything to keep you from continuing your income-generating activities beyond 8 to 10 hours per day.

Structure the time you'll spend to pursue your career opportunities to accommodate both your new full-time job activities and your personal life. This way, you'll spend your time wisely and avoid neglecting anyone, including yourself.

After you've picked yourself up by protecting your vulnerabilities, budgeting your money, and spending your time wisely, your next step is to dust yourself off.