

Fired at fifty: research shows the best way forward

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Research from the University of Bath shows that the way older managers make sense of a sudden job loss dramatically affects how they cope with the experience.

The two-year study found that executives and professionals who were most inclined to make the best of the situation and open to change fared better than those driven to regain their former status.

The managers who took part in the research, aged 49 to 62, all held senior, high-earning positions. They lost their [jobs](#) in acrimonious circumstances and all felt deeply traumatized.

Professor Yiannis Gabriel and colleagues at the University of Surrey, David Gray and Harshita Goregaokar, invited the managers to talk to them about what had happened and discovered they had created different storylines or 'narrative coping' strategies to make sense of their situation.

Those that coped most successfully were able to see the situation as a new chapter in their lives that included part-time work, self-employment, study and volunteering.

They were able to take a philosophical approach to their job loss, and had accepted that life may or may not return to what it was. They had redefined themselves outside of their former career status and the trauma of their unemployment.

In contrast, a second group saw their job loss as the ‘end of the line’ and believed their career was over. Although they saw themselves in a new post-career phase in their life, they were deeply wounded by their [job loss](#) and experienced profound despair, feelings of devastation and acute depression.

A final group coped somewhat better by viewing their situation as a ‘temporary derailment’ of their career which would eventually return to its former glory.

Professor Gabriel, from the University of Bath’s School of Management, said: “In the years and decades ahead we’re likely to find more and more ‘successful’ professionals in late career confronting the reality of unemployment, vastly reduced income, power and status.

“Our study shows that coaching can play a modest but significant part in helping these professionals to come to terms with their predicament. Importantly, effective coaches seem to help unemployed professionals redefine themselves.

“Professionals are more likely to come to terms with unemployment if they can create a story which allows them to discover their voice as a person who is unemployed but whose identity is not defined by their unemployment.”

The researchers interviewed a small group of men and women who were part of a government funded coaching scheme for older unemployed managers in the outset of the 2008 economic downturn. They were interviewed for around two hours and took part in focus groups and informal discussions.

More information: oss.sagepub.com/content/31/12/1687

Provided by University of Bath

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