

Dear Counselor

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Some Scared Stiff about Layoff Rumors

Dear Suzanne: I work for a large corporation locally that has been bought by another large corporation. Rumors are flying about layoffs and I am so scared. I keep thinking about what I would do if it happened to me, why I might be chosen to go, and I can hardly work, eat or sleep. Help! -- Jill

Dear Jill: Possible layoffs create a number of expectable but no less painful responses in all threatened employees. We all invest a great deal of ourselves in our work and a great deal of attachment and loyalty to our employers. Our jobs and work roles become an important part of our identities and so any threat to the security of our jobs provokes feelings of insecurity, betrayal, helplessness and lack of control over our careers, questions about our worth and value if we could be seen as expendable, and questions even about who we are.

Change is never easy. Changes such as layoffs can be felt to be a threat to survival and usually necessitate a complete reorganization of the self, and a reassessment of work and career goals and realities. The comfortable safety of job security is shattered and can make people anxious and fearful as you describe. Actually, people go through stages of anticipatory grief -- disbelief, anger, sadness, bargaining with fate (why me?, what could I have done?, etc.) and finally acceptance.

I know it sounds like Pollyanna, but sometimes this kind of shake-up can be an opportunity to reevaluate your goals and direction in your life, and the balance of work and family in your life.

It is important to try to keep in mind that layoffs are economic decisions and to not take it personally as a reflection on you or your work. It has nothing to do with your competence.

It is also important to keep in mind that you still have power and control over you

own life. If your company offers outplacement, make sure to take advantage of it. There you will learn to write your resume, network effectively, and define and clarify your career goals.

Further, if your company has an EAP, use it! There you will get an opportunity to sort out how you feel about all of this.

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