

# Surviving Downsizing

(For Employees)



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## Learning Objectives

- Describe the different aspects of being a “surviving” employee
- Identify changes created by downsizing in the workplace
- Discuss normal reactions to downsizing
- Explore your work role and the new organizational realities
- Understand ways to support yourself and others during the transition process

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## I've Still Got a Job....

- Downsizing announced and/or conducted
- Your job has been retained
- What happens next?



## Why Can Surviving Downsizing be a Challenge?

- Change in the "Psychological Contract"
- Increased uncertainty and job insecurity
- Loss of work relationships
- Change in the work itself
- The "Survivor Syndrome"

## What is the "Survivor Syndrome"?

- "A set of attitudes, feelings and perceptions that occur in employees who remain in organizational systems following involuntary employee reductions."
- Survivor "sickness" arises because employees feel violated by the layoffs of co-workers.

From: Noer, D.M. *Healing the Wounds: Overcoming the Trauma of Layoffs and Revitalizing Downsized Organizations* (1993) (p.13).

## Typical Symptoms of the "Survivor Syndrome"

- Anger
- Depression
- Fear
- Distrust
- Guilt
- Job Insecurity
- Unfairness
- Stress & fatigue
- Betrayal
- Fatigue
- Reduced risk-taking
- Reduced motivation
- Resentment
- Health problems
- Helplessness
- Low morale
- Sagging productivity
- Advancement concerns
- Salary & benefit concerns
- Relief

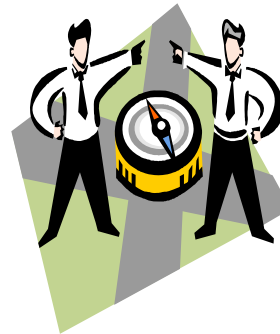
## Understanding Changes due to Downsizing

- Identify the Current Changes
  - What's happening now
  - Primary changes
  - Secondary changes
- Clarify Rationale for Change
  - Why are changes happening?
  - Does it make sense?
- Identify the Losses Involved
  - Personal losses
  - Professional losses



## Change and Loss: Some Examples

- What types of losses are occurring?
  - Co-workers laid-off
  - Retirements
  - Reorganization
  - What else?
- Professional loss
  - Loss of co-worker(s) or work group
  - Change how work gets done
  - Change of locations
  - What else?
- Personal loss
  - Loss of friendships
  - Loss of confidence
  - What else?



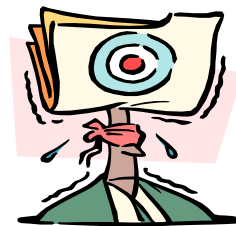
## Transitions during Downsizing

- Denial
  - Immobilization/shock
- Resistance
  - Emotional
  - Behavioral
- Exploration
  - Testing new possibilities
- Acceptance
  - Making commitment to change
  - Taking responsibility for personal decisions/choices



## Typical Reactions to Downsizing

- Intensity of individual reactions depend on:
  - Personal/Professional Experiences
  - Personal/Professional Circumstances
- Normal human reactions include:
  - Emotional
  - Physical
  - Mental
  - Behavioral



## Normal Emotional Reactions

- Anger
- Anxiety
- Apathy
- Depression
- Denial/shock
- Distrust
- Fear
- Frustration
- Relief
- Irritability
- Emptiness
- Guilt
- Numbness
- Powerlessness
- Resentment
- Sadness
- Loneliness



## Normal Physical Reactions

- Digestion problems
- Dizziness
- Changes in eating (overeating/loss of appetite)
- Fatigue
- Hyperactivity
- Muscle aches
- Rapid heartbeat
- Shortness of breath
- Sleep disturbances
- Headaches



## Normal Mental Reactions

- Confusion
- Daydreaming
- Disorganization
- Lack of concentration
- Poor judgment
- Poor memory recall
- Preoccupation
- Self-blame
- Decreased decision-making capability



## Common Individual Behaviors After Downsizing

- Do "more of the same"
- Do enough to "try to get by"
- Move with uncertainty and cautiousness
- What else?



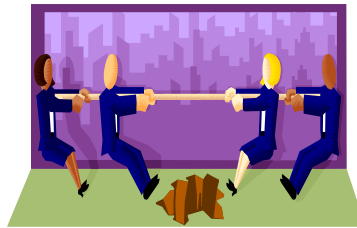
## Normal Workplace Behavioral Reactions

- Communication deteriorates
- Productivity suffers
- Team work falls apart
- Power/turf struggles intensify
- Passive-aggressive behavior may increase
- Morale decreases
- People leave or quit
- People withdraw/isolate themselves
- Resistance to new changes



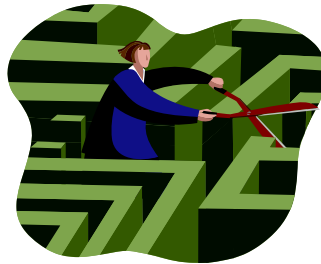
## Resistance to Changes After Downsizing

- Concerns about future expectations
- Ripple effect, including more work
- Fear of learning new tasks
- Past resentments can re-surface
- Facing potential or real losses
- Lack of control
- Too much uncertainty



## Managing the Personal Impact of Downsizing

- Understand normal personal reactions
  - Acknowledge your own reactions to the changes
- Assume responsibility for personal behavior
- Utilize available resources
- Take care of yourself



## Responding to Co-Workers

- Anticipate emotional reactions
- Avoid internalizing other's reactions
- Be an active empathetic listener
- Be honest and forthcoming
- Value individual perspectives
- Assure co-workers they are valued
  - Remaining co-workers
  - Laid-off co-workers
- Encourage use of the EAP



## The New “Psychological Contract”

- Organizations no longer provide “security”:
  - Employment may not be long-term
  - Long-term employment is not a reward for loyalty and good work
- Organizations can provide:
  - Opportunities to use current skills and abilities
  - Opportunities to learn new skills
  - Access to work challenges for employees to increase future employment options

## What is the “Protean Career”?

- Managed by the person, not organization
- A lifelong series of:
  - Experiences & learning
  - Skills
  - Transitions
  - Identity changes
- Development is:
  - Self-directed
  - Relational
  - Continuous learning/education
  - Found in work challenges



## The Protean vs. Traditional Career (Hall, 2002)

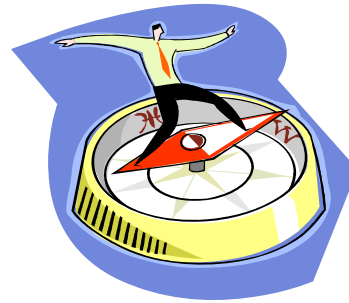
Issue	Protean Career	Traditional Organizational Career
<i>Who's in charge?</i>	Person	Organization
<i>Core values</i>	Freedom Growth	Advancement
<i>Degree of mobility</i>	High	Lower
<i>Success criteria</i>	Psychological success	Position level Salary
<i>Key attitudes</i>	Work satisfaction Professional commitment	Organizational commitment

## Clarifying Your Work Role After Downsizing

- What are the new organizational realities?
- What skills and experiences are most necessary?
- Are there skills and competencies not needed?
- How do others view my skills and contributions?
- What are my job satisfiers? Do I need to identify new job satisfiers?
- Do I need to rebuild my support system at work?
- What are my other sources of support?

## Action Planning After Downsizing

- Identify What Information You Need
  - Personal
  - Professional
- Identify Your Resources
  - Internal
  - External
- Clarify Options
  - Personal
  - Professional
- Identify Opportunities
  - What do you want to get out of the change?
  - Evaluating risks and benefits



## Positive Stress Management Strategies

- Change your Behavior
  - Use Humor Appropriately
  - Get Organized!
  - Vent Emotionally
- Create Social Support
  - Identify Your Needs
  - Communicate
  - Use Your EAP
- Change your Lifestyle
  - Good Nutrition
  - Exercise
  - Get Plenty of Sleep
  - Use Stress Reduction Techniques
- Identify What's Important
  - Values/Goals
  - Talents & Abilities



## Resources

- Internal
  - Human Resources
  - Direct Supervisor/Manager
  - *Who Else?*
  
- External
  - MHN Online [www.members.MHN.com](http://www.members.MHN.com)
    - (company code: cityoflosangeles)
  - MHN EAP Clinical Services
    - (800) 213-5813
  - *Who Else?*



# Handout A.

## Clarifying Your Work Role After The Downsizing

**What are the new organizational realities?** Do I understand the new organization chart, reporting relationships, expectations of me and current mission of my work group? If not, how can I clarify?

**What skills and experiences are most necessary?** What skills and experience seem most necessary in my new work role? Do I feel capable of acquiring them?

**Are there skills and competencies not needed?** What skills and competencies have I used in the past that may not be as useful currently?

**How do others view my skills and contributions?** Do I know how others view my skills and contributions? Have I asked anyone recently and received direct feedback or am I making assumptions?

**What are my job satisfiers? Do I need to identify new job satisfiers?** What were my job satisfiers before the downsizing? What can I retain of those in my new role? What satisfiers have I lost that may effect my attitude and work performance?

**Do I need to rebuild my support system at work?** Have friends been laid off and has my support system changed? Do I need/want to do anything differently to build some new work relationships?

**What are my other sources of support?** Am I taking good care of myself during this time of transition? What do I want to do more of? What do I want to do less of?

# Handout B.

## An Action Plan

**Identify What Information You Need.** Learn everything you can about the change.

Ask yourself questions such as:

- What information do I need to get in order to evaluate the change?
- What's the worse thing that can happen?
- What do I stand to lose because of this change?
- How is this change affecting me now?
- Who or what is in control of the effects of this change now?
- Is there a way to minimize the negative effects of the change?
- What result do I want to avoid?
- What result do I want to create?

**Identify Your Resources.** These include resources both internal and external to your organization.

When identifying and evaluating your resources, ask yourself:

- What do I value and what are my goals?
- What talents and abilities do I possess to help me deal with the change?
- How can the resources that I have identified work collaboratively or in conjunction with one another to assist me through the transition?

**Clarify Options.** Think about and evaluate your options with some of the following questions in mind:

- What do you want to get out of the change?
- What are the possibilities and opportunities for *growing*? for learning? for becoming wiser? stronger? healthier? more loving? more productive?

**Identify Opportunities.** Begin by asking yourself, in light of your change:

- What benefits or gains are hidden in this call to change?
- What actions do I need to engage in to effectively deal with this change? Which choices best match my values and goals, and best utilize my talents and abilities?

# Handout C.

## Positive Stress Management Strategies

### Change your Behavior

#### Get organized

- Reduce clutter and mess in your personal and job spaces
- Use devices such as schedules, daytimers, appointment books or PDA's to keep on top of appointments. (Make sure to include your leisure time activities....scheduling in "down time" helps reduce stress!)
- Make daily to-do lists!
- Allow sufficient time to get to appointments.
- Refrain from becoming overscheduled.

#### Vent emotionally (safely and appropriately)

- Find a safe place or person(s) to blow off steam.
- Keep venting to the topic of stress.
- Allow yourself a set time to "gripe" or vent about the event or issue (say 10 or 15 minutes).
- Let the stressor go and get on with your life.

#### Use humor

- Try to find humor in the stressful event or issue.
- Use humor as a "pressure valve" if the stressor is creating frustration or anxiety.
- Use humor to keep perspective on the stressful situation.

### Change your Lifestyle

**Healthy diet.** Eat nutritious meals; keep sodium and fat content low (or reasonable) to prevent stress on the heart and circulatory system.

**Stop smoking.** Smoking pollutes the body with over 400 chemicals with each puff taken and adds carcinogens to your lungs. Polluting your lungs adds physical stress to your body and reduces cardio-pulmonary functioning.

**Reduce alcohol consumption.** Moderate consumption (one or two drinks per day, no more) does not harm, and may enhance, circulatory functioning by reducing cholesterol.

**Exercise.** Aerobic and strength training exercises increase the efficiency of your body's metabolism and helps to ward off the effects of stress. Additionally, your body may become more efficient in self-healing.

**Sleep.** The average adult needs 8 hours of sleep per night. If you rob yourself of an hour or two of sleep each night, you build up a significant "sleep debt" that puts physical stress on your body. Depriving yourself of sleep regularly decreases your body's effectiveness and efficiency and does not provide enough time for your body to rest, restore, and rebuild.

**Pursue leisure activities.** Find an activity that helps you mentally and/or physically remove yourself from stressors. Gardening, fishing, reading, or jogging are all good ways to create time for yourself and de-stress.

**Engage in active relaxation.** Active relaxation requires that you engage in activities in which you mentally focus on reducing the physical symptoms of stress. By changing the physical manifestations of stress (such as slowing down your breathing) you correspondingly feel mentally or emotionally less stressed. Visual imagery, deep breathing, and toe tensing are all techniques used to de-stress.

### **Create Social Support**

**Identify your needs.** To help your support network help you during times of stress, it is valuable to identify how they can help you. Would you like a “sounding board”, someone to listen and let you vent? Would you like your support people to help you find solutions to stressful events and situations in your life?

**Communicate your needs to your allies.** Think of a way that clearly tells your supporting friends or family the ways that they can help you during times of stress. Try to be patient and courteous during this process, because they will be learning with you! These discussions are most beneficial when they occur before a stressful situation hits.

Use “I” statements and describe the behavior you need (or don’t need) from your support person. For example: “I feel like my feelings are being negated when you tell me to ‘get over’ myself. Please do not do this”.

**Use Your EAP.** When the stress of change becomes overwhelming, reach out for help.

### **Identify What’s Important**

Stepping back to identify what is important to you is a good technique to buffer yourself against the stress of change. When you come back to what is important, cherished or central to what is meaningful in your life, clarity about the stress-inducing situation is gained and then stress is reduced.

**Values/Goals.** When your actions align with your values and goals, then stress is reduced.

**Talents & Abilities.** Identify your talents and abilities (many tools exist online for free or a nominal charge). Then determine how you would like to use these talents and abilities in your hobbies, at work, or in your everyday life. Our lives feel happier and less stressful when we do what we are good at doing and what we like to do.