

Leaving and Saying Goodbye to Co-Workers When You Have Lost Your Job

Overview

Saying goodbye to co-workers and your manager when you have lost your job.

- Saying goodbye to co-workers
- Saying goodbye to your manager
- Steps to take before you leave
- Keeping in touch with co-workers after you leave

Saying goodbye to co-workers can be one of the most difficult parts of being laid off or losing your job. Even if you worked for your company for only a short time or didn't feel close to many of your co-workers, you may have very intense emotions about leaving. The information that follows provides suggestions on ways to say goodbye to co-workers and your manager, and ways to keep in touch with the people you care about.

Saying goodbye to co-workers

How you prepare to leave your company may depend on the circumstances surrounding your job loss. For example, if you're the only person who has been laid off, or one of only a few people, you may want to work out a private way to say goodbye to co-workers. Saying goodbye will be different if this has been a large work-force reduction. You will have more support from other co-workers who have been laid off, although you may still experience strong feelings of grief and loss.

No matter what the circumstances are, these steps can help you prepare to leave and say goodbye:

- *Collect the home addresses, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses of people you want to stay in touch with.* Talk about the best way to stay in touch with each other. It's important to build a network of professional and personal contacts. These contacts can be instrumental in your job search.
- *Let co-workers take you out for lunch if they offer.* Don't turn them down because you "don't feel like celebrating." Going out with co-workers may make you feel better, and may give you a head start on networking and discussing your future job options.
- *Tell co-workers you'll miss them.* Try to be as specific as you can about what you'll miss. You might say, "I've really admired how cheerfully you've dealt with customers," or "It's been an inspiration to see how calmly you handle deadlines." If you aren't sure what to say, just make a simple acknowledgment of your feelings, such as, "I'll miss you."
- *On your last day, say goodbye personally to anyone who mattered to you.* Shake hands with anyone with whom you've had a friendly but strictly professional relationship. Hug someone who has become a close friend. Consider leaving flowers or a small goodbye gift for someone who has been especially important to you.

Saying goodbye to your manager

It can be hard to say goodbye to your manager, especially if he or she told you that you were being laid off. But saying goodbye in an appropriate and professional way can be essential to your future job prospects.

- *Thank your manager for his or her help while you've worked for the company.* Find something positive to say even if you've had difficulties working together. "Burning bridges" is rarely a good idea, even if you feel that way at the moment.
- *Let your manager know if you would consider returning to the company.* If you've had a great experience working for your company, say so. Let your manager know whether you would consider working for the company again if things changed, or if you would consider working on a part-time, a freelance, or an occasional basis.
- *Make sure you receive a letter about the layoff* from your manager or human resources (HR) department. If a work-force reduction has occurred, you may have received a letter from your manager or HR department explaining that you lost your job as part of a layoff. If not, see if you can get one. This letter can help you explain the layoff to potential employers.

Steps to take before you leave

- *Schedule a meeting with your manager.* Schedule a time to talk with your manager after you have absorbed the news of your job loss and you are able to think about the future. Discuss with your manager how references and letters of recommendation will be handled. You may want to take notes at the meeting. Because this is such a stressful situation, it's difficult to remember all that's being said, so it's wise to write down key information.
- *Take home all personal belongings.* Remember to take all personal files with you when you depart. You'll need names and numbers of contacts for your job search. However, be careful not to remove any company property from the premises. If you have questions about whether something is personal or company property, check with your manager or HR department. Removing property that is not yours, even if it's an innocent mistake, could jeopardize your severance, reputation, or references.

Keeping in touch with co-workers after you leave

Here are some suggestions on keeping in touch with people you care about after you leave:

- *If you were the only person laid off or part of a small group, don't vent your frustrations on co-workers who are staying.* Hearing about your frustrations may make them feel guilty or awkward. Talk about how you're moving forward -- for example, about the progress you're making in your job search or your thoughts and ideas for the future.

- *Avoid boasting about a new job.* You may be very excited if you get a great job quickly and want to tell all your former co-workers about it. But avoid anything that might sound like bragging. Instead of calling everybody in your old group, consider telling one or two of your closest co-workers and letting them pass the word in the natural course of their conversations with others.
- *Consider forming a support group of former co-workers.* Many people find new jobs very quickly after a layoff. For others, it may take months to find a new job. If you are in the second category, you may want to form a support group of former co-workers, and get together weekly or monthly to share ideas on topics such as updating your resume or job hunting on the Internet. Many community centers, colleges, and YMCAs have support groups for people who have lost their jobs. You and one or two of your former co-workers might plan to attend one of these together.

Written with the help of David Roper, B.A. Mr. Roper is a career development specialist with 25 years of experience directing A-Script™, a full-service career management/job search assistance firm based in Massachusetts. He is the author of *Getting the Job You Want . . . Now!* (Warner Books), and he has also written for numerous national publications, including the *Wall Street Journal's* "National Business Employment Weekly."