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ISBN-13: 978-0-13-702114-7  
ISBN-10: 0-13-702114-3



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FINANCIAL TIMES

[www.ftpress.com](http://www.ftpress.com) | An imprint of Pearson

\$18.99 US / \$23.99 Canada

FINNEY

REBOUND

A Proven Plan for  
Starting Over After Job Loss

**FT**  
Press

# REBOUND

A Proven Plan  
for Starting Over  
After Job Loss

MARTHA I. FINNEY

You've just lost your job. (Or you're expecting to.) You know you're not alone: Millions of great people are losing their jobs these days. But this is *you* we're talking about. Losing your job can turn your life upside down. It can mess with your mind, your heart, your health, your family life...*not to mention your financial security*. Losing your job is just plain painful.

This practical book will help you get through the trauma—and come out stronger, smarter, better.

Top workplace expert Martha Finney brings together all the answers you need to empower yourself and regain mastery over your own life. Drawing on powerful insights and personal stories from an enormous network of experts, she answers questions like: *How do I protect my finances? How do I get past the anger, alienation, and isolation? Why haven't I heard from my coworkers? What are my rights? Can I get a better severance package? Can I sue? Should I? How do I stay on my career path and keep my options open? How can I objectively evaluate a new job offer?*

From start to finish, this book will help you identify your best next steps: the steps that'll help you get past the trauma and move forward—emotionally, financially, in your career, and in every part of your life.

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### **The 29 first, best, and worst things to do after a layoff or firing**

*What to do right now—and what you should never do*

### **How to protect yourself, one step at a time**

*Practical solutions for safeguarding your finances, your health, and your family*

### **Build your status as an “A” player**

*Enhancing your visibility, skills, and even your prestige while you're out of work*

### **Learn to love networking**

*It's not as bad as you think—really!*

### **Keep it from happening again**

*Rethinking the whole way you look at employment*

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**Martha I. Finney** is President and CEO of Engagement Journeys, LLC, and an internationally-respected expert in employee engagement and leadership communications. A business journalist for 20 years before becoming a full-time consultant, she specializes in helping organizations achieve greater employee loyalty, retention, and passion.

Finney is author or coauthor of more than 13 books, including *The Truth About Getting the Best From People* (FT Press) and *HR From the Heart* with Yahoo's Chief People Officer, Libby Sartain. Her original research on the American workplace has been featured on CNN, NPR's Morning Edition, and in major newspapers nationwide.

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# Start Your New Job with Confidence

Companies may be laying people off, but they're also hiring. And sooner or later (preferably sooner), your time will come to start a new job—hopefully within shouting distance of your former salary and management level. If you're assuming a new job with a leadership component to your duties, you've got a new set of challenges to prepare yourself for. In good times, the failure rates of newly employed leaders are abysmal. (Some say as many as 60% to 70% of newly hired managers are fired within six months of taking on their new jobs.) If you're taking on a leadership job in bad times, you know that there is a long line of candidates ready to step in if you fail. And you may think that the psychological wounds of losing your previous job might get in the way of your taking charge with confidence. Right now you have to find a way to exude confidence and assume leadership when you might be feeling the least confident and not nearly as leaderly as you might like.

Says Mark Walztoni, a Santa Fe-based executive coach who specializes in the first 100 days of a leader's new job: "New leaders are facing three emotional roadblocks when they are starting a new job, especially after they've been laid off. They know the stakes are extremely high and don't want to be in the job market again. So they become risk averse—and could ultimately get fired for being ineffective. Or they go back to old behaviors that may or may not have worked for them before, but are completely inappropriate to their new jobs. Or they completely overcompensate for their self-doubt and behave too forcefully and aggressively in their new one."

Isn't it comforting to know there are three ways you can totally screw up your new job? But you can also succeed brilliantly in your new job. You just need a plan to take things one step at a time and to ask your new coworkers (and boss) to help you succeed.

**Assess your current people skills.** Objectively consider your strengths and weaknesses as a manager before going into your new job. What did the 360-degree feedback reports from your last job tell you about where you shine as a leader and where you could use some coaching? How about your direct reports' engagement survey scores? Do you have a former employee who is confident enough to tell you the truth, even if it's difficult truth? The culture of your new company may be drastically different from that of your former organization. But people are pretty much the same in terms of how they like to be treated. Now, before you start your new job, is a very good time to identify those behaviors that make you a great people leader (so that you can do more of those) and those behaviors that you would benefit from correcting.

**Ask your new boss to help you identify two or three critical goals you can achieve during your first three months.** Walztoni characterizes them as "small enough to win, big enough to matter." What's the objective? How will success be measured? How will your boss want to be told that these goals have been reached?

**Plan an initial, focused, mandatory meeting with your team to discuss work styles.** Walztoni suggests that a minimum of two hours be set aside for this first meeting. Dedicate the first hour to explaining your management style, what's important to you in terms of performance, behaviors, and results.

**At the second hour, throw the floor open to your new direct reports.** Give them the chance to tell you how they like to work, what makes them feel good about their jobs, how they like to be

recognized, what they need to feel motivated. This is the time for you to demonstrate that you're a listening leader and that you care what their input is. Show your new team that they can tell you anything, the difficult news and the positive. That you will hear it and understand it. And then take action, if necessary.

Walztoni says, "Ask them what two or three changes they would like to see in their organization. Then make those changes happen and let them know you fulfilled their wishes." He says that you have "the biggest opportunity to shake the tree positively in your first 100 days." Your new organization wants to demonstrate to you that it will provide you with the resources you need to remove barriers that are keeping your team from being successful. Take advantage of that honeymoon period to show your direct reports that you can get things done to their benefit.

**Reach out to your peers within the second or third week.** On a one-on-one basis (maybe over lunch), ask them to tell you about what worked well with your predecessor, and what didn't work so well. Remember it's not your intention to dish the dirt on the person who came before you, so be mindful that it doesn't degenerate into a bad-mouthing session. (Your new coworkers could get the impression that you're a gossip even though they did all the talking.) Be clear and careful that the discussion is about how you can succeed in your new role in such a way as to help them do *their* jobs better.

**Ask them to fast forward in their imaginations a month, three months, six months into the future.** To their mind, what would a successful working relationship with you look like? Ask them to describe that relationship in as detailed a way as possible. How would they like to be communicated with? Via phone? Email? A personal walk down the hall? What feels responsive to them? An immediate return email? An update when the task at hand is accomplished? What might make them feel uncomfortable or worried about the work you're doing? What would make them confident?

**Listen to their feedback without interrupting.** And then repeat what you think you've heard so that they get that you got it. Then recruit their help in your success. You don't have to lose your dignity here, but now's not the time for false pride or posturing. You're collecting team members all around you, below, beside, and above you. And they're going to feel personally invested in ensuring your success. After all, who wants to break in your successor? They're probably tired of seeing new faces in your department. A little familiarity could be a nice change for them, too.

**Remember to pay it forward.** You aren't the first new manager hire. And you probably won't be the last. As your own tenure at the company lengthens, you'll start seeing new managers. And you know what they'll be thinking, starting with, "Oh please, let this be my last new job for a while."

**Reach out to them.** Find out whether they might be interested in hearing from someone who has successfully landed. Take them to lunch. Tell them what you've learned that works especially well in this new culture they're in. Introduce them to the more tenured managers—the ones who helped you when you started. But don't rush or judge them. Just make the offer available to them; they can take you up on it when they're ready.

**Cut yourself a break.** Some things are within your control. And, frankly, some things aren't.

Says Walztoni: "Stephen Covey talks about the *circle of influence* and the *circle of concern*. You can be concerned that the sword could drop again any time—and it could. It has before. But what you are really able to influence is your relationships with your manager, your peers, and the people who will work for you. You can help your people achieve the results that your organization and company needs to realize its goals. Stay with what you can influence."

**The best thing you can do:**

Find out what the two to three critical wins are that your organization needs from you, and deliver them. At least once a month, remember to ask for monthly feedback on your progress against its expectations. If you are achieving those goals, this will give the opportunity to notice how effective you have been.

**The worst thing you can do:**

Sit back, relax, and think that being laid off could never happen again.

**The first thing you should do:**

Be thankful for the opportunity to contribute in a new organization, and then do the preceding “best thing you can do.”

### Voice of Experience: Sarah

I had been with my company for 19 years and 6 months. And I was laid off by a newly installed management team while I was on vacation in Aruba. Everyone at work knew because my email address had disappeared. But I found out when my boyfriend picked me up at the airport and said, “There’s a message on the machine from your manager. You will want to listen to it when you get home.”

I had been grumbling about my job for a very long time. I just didn’t know how to leave. It felt like I was just stuck there. But I was also extremely afraid of losing my job, and now it happened.

I realized this is what I wanted to happen all along, plus I get a package. So now I could figure out what I wanted to do. I went in the next day, and all my friends came to help me pack up. That’s when it first hit me that after having been there for so many years, helping so many people, promoting people, it finally came down to, “That’s it, see you later.” I was let go by a bunch of people who didn’t even know me.

I was angry because my friends were there. I don't have any family, so they had become my family. That was probably what bothered me more than anything else.

Even though I got a year's salary and could have taken the time to think about what I really wanted to do next, it was scary. And so I immediately made a few phone calls to former colleagues who had started a business. They needed me right away, so I jumped right into the next job. I went from a completely structured environment in my old job to a free-for-all in this new culture. I was there only ten very painful months before I quit that job. Basically, that was just the wrong job, and I had just put off the inevitable of grieving and processing through the loss of my first job.

In 18 months, I had lost a job and I quit a job. I'm now a consultant. It's not my dream job, but you know what? I don't think there is a dream job out there for me. To me a job is somewhere I can go where I can work with people I like and make things happen. So that could really be anywhere.

From a mental perspective, this whole experience strengthened me as a person. It built my character and it boosted my confidence. It took away the fears I had. I'm no longer afraid of losing my job.

The other thing that really struck me was the way losing my job changed my identity. I used to be the powerful person in the big corner office. And the people who used to fawn all over me before really have no time for me now. When I see them in the lobby, where I wait to meet a friend for lunch, they'll walk right by. When I was sitting in the big office, I was somebody. Now I have to be somebody without the big office.

If I felt I could influence change back in my old company and help people with the way I am today, I'd go back. But would I

go back to the same environment and work under the same conditions? No way. I'm not that person anymore. I took a crash course in growing up in the past 18 months, that's for sure. And I don't think I ever would have done that if they hadn't thrown me out. But even today I still have the problem where I will refer to my old company as "we."

**The best thing you can do:**

Resist the temptation of taking the next job too quickly, if you can afford to. You need to take advantage of the downtime you've been given to rediscover yourself.

**The worst thing you can do:**

Blame the messenger. It's really not his fault.

**The first thing you should do:**

Sit down and think about the positive ways this can affect your life.