

“Springing the Blues” **Beating Unemployment Depression**

By Jason Hosch, Ph.D.

Over these past few years now, we’ve dealt with what has appeared to be a relentless problem of economic downturn and rising unemployment. Cutbacks, reorganization, downsizing, layoffs – whatever we hear it called, the bottom line is more people are finding themselves unemployed. Chances are if you have not lost your job, you know someone who has, and you are experiencing the stress of impending layoffs. Let’s face it, there is no such thing as “job security” in today’s economic climate. In fact, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the unemployment rate here in Jacksonville as of March, 2010 hit 11.9%, with the national average hovering around 10.2%.

Rising unemployment is undoubtedly a source of stress for those immediately affected, including their families. Those facing unemployment may also find themselves out of work for longer periods of time, which makes them more susceptible to depression. Those unemployed for more than three months are highly susceptible to depression, and those unemployed for six months or longer are prone to depressive illness. Some of the beginning signs of depression include headaches, stomachaches, gastrointestinal distress, and sexual dysfunction. Other eventual symptoms include irritability/restlessness, difficulty concentrating, insomnia, fatigue, sluggishness, feelings of guilt/worthlessness/hopelessness/pessimism, loss of interest in activities previously enjoyed (including sex), overeating or appetite loss, persistent sad, anxious, or “empty” feelings, persistent aches or pains (including headaches, cramps, or digestive problems) which do not ease with treatment, and thoughts or attempts of suicide.

These symptoms sound very “depressing”, I know, because they are. Left untreated, depression becomes a vicious cycle, which can make it harder to find a job. But rather than dwell on the negative, let’s look at some tips for overcoming, or “springing the blues”. Among those:

- *Realize that you are not alone.* About one in every eight people in Jacksonville is going through the same thing.
- *Understand that feeling bad about what happened is completely normal.* There are a lot of emotions that are just a natural part of a career change.
- *Know that unemployment is just a temporary life cycle.* It is period of readjustment, and it is not permanent.

- *Develop a plan.* Create a daily schedule and stick to it. Use this time to prep your resume, hone your interview skills, network with others in your field, and generate contacts for prospective employment. Make “cold calls”, ask for interviews, and dress for success. Among other things, you may boost your job skills through classes or training. However, it is equally important that you balance your job seeking efforts with rest and with activities that you find enjoyable.
- *Keep the big picture.* This is probably the most important concept for us grasp. While the previous tip spoke more to logistics and what we can do to proactively mobilize ourselves for success, this one speaks more to our spiritual needs (which by the way, often get overlooked because they are not necessarily tangible or measurable). It is important that we use this time to reevaluate our priorities, our occupational interests, and our career direction. Look at this time as an opportunity for personal growth. Know the “Three A’s” - that the only things we are truly in control of in life are our actions, our acceptance (of ourselves and of others), and our attitude. As for all the rest, God is in control. Know that sometimes things happen for a reason which we do not understand, but in the end, it works out for the better. It is important that you keep faith that you and your family are going to be OK, but also know that you must do your part. Among other things, make choices to maintain a healthy lifestyle, to include proper diet, exercise, and sleep. These physical factors have a profound influence on so many other areas of our life.
- *Know when to get help.* The stresses of unemployment can lead to serious depression if they are not dealt with promptly and proactively. Stay aware of the signs and symptoms of depression, and seek professional help if they get severe.

Altogether, remember that you are not alone if you are facing unemployment in these times. Stay aware of your mental state, and be proactive in fighting the blues. Maintain a healthy perspective, do your part (within the “Three A’s”), and be faithful that as it relates to unemployment, “this too shall pass”. ■



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