

What to Do After You Get Fired

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FULL TEXT

In brief

- * Try to negotiate your severance package and check whether you are eligible for unemployment.
- * Surround yourself with people who support you.
- * Try to see the experience as an opportunity.

When Melissa Ben-Ishay was 24 years old, she was fired from her job as an assistant media planner for poor performance. She wasn't passionate about the job, she says, and it showed. Still, she was disappointed, and thought it was unfair that she had been fired. She called her brother, Brian Bushell, who told her that getting fired was the best thing that could happen to her.

Ms. Ben-Ishay was known among her family and friends for baking tie-dye cupcakes. "Go home and bake your cupcakes," she says her brother told her. "We'll start a business out of it."

Twelve years later, Ms. Ben-Ishay is the chief executive of "Baked by Melissa," which has 14 locations in New York and New Jersey and ships cupcakes nationwide. "It's very difficult to see losing your job as an opportunity when you're in it," Ms. Ben-Ishay says. But if you have a positive outlook, you can also bounce back after being fired, she says.

Take a deep breath.

The first thing you should do is take some time to reflect, says Ebony Joyce, a career coach and founder of Next Level Career Services. You can take some time to collect yourself, and don't need to start applying for new jobs the same day. "You want to allow yourself some grace," Ms. Joyce says. "Give yourself the opportunity and have a positive mindset regardless of the reason why it happened."

Negotiate your severance package.

Depending on where you work, you might have an exit interview with a human-resources representative. You should ask whether you will receive severance pay, as well as how you will be compensated for any unused vacation days. Remember that you can negotiate within reason. During this conversation, make sure the employer has your current postal and email addresses in case there are any questions.

Check whether you are eligible for unemployment benefits.

To collect these benefits, you must be unemployed through "no fault of your own," according to the Labor Department. That means if you were fired for misconduct, which could include causes such as stealing, lying or harassment, you will not be eligible. But if you were fired because you weren't a good fit for the job or because you lack skills, you might be eligible for benefits, depending on where you live. You can learn more about eligibility in your state at CareerOneStop.

Take time to grieve.

There are stages of grief when you lose a job, just as there are when you experience other types of losses, and it is normal to mourn the loss of a job or your career as it once was, says Jenny Logullo, a career coach and founder of Workplace Worth Academy. After you have taken time to grieve, you can begin to move forward, assess your skills and make intentional choices about what you would like to do next, she says.

Surround yourself with people who support you.

After Ms. Ben-Ishay was fired, she found support from her older brother, who encouraged her to keep going with

her business even when she doubted herself. She recommends finding a support network: "Now more than ever, it's so incredibly important to surround yourself with people who support you and have that confidence in you when you don't necessarily have it in yourself."

Start thinking about how you will talk about this experience.

Typically, when you are fired, there was an action that you either took or did not take, says Ms. Logullo. Your next employer will want to know why you left the position, she says. So you will need to craft an explanation that demonstrates that you recognize what happened, and acknowledge what you did or did not do in your previous role so you can learn from it and correct for it in the future. Instead of saying, for example, "They weren't happy with my performance," you can say the position wasn't a perfect fit, and you are excited to learn and build skills in a certain area in the future. "That kind of outcome-driven story is so much more motivating and promising," she says. Think about how you will address a potential employment gap as you update your résumé, craft cover letters and prepare for your next interview .

Look at this as an opportunity.

There is good that can come out of the situation, Ms. Ben-Ishay says, and you should try to stay positive and hopeful. "I think you are the way you respond to the things that happen that are out of your control," she says. "Those moments define you."

Resources

* A state-by-state list of unemployment insurance contacts from the Department of Labor.

* CareerOneStop may provide more information about unemployment benefits in your state.

What to read next

Further reading

Credit: By Allison Pohle

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