



Book You're Fired!

A Unique Approach to Rebuilding Your Life

Eileen L. Berman, Ed.D.
Authority Press, 1998

Recommendation

Eileen Berman uses two literary devices in her book, *You're Fired!* The first is a carefully constructed narrative about a fired executive that she uses to describe her approach to rebuilding a shattered life. The man feels a loss of identity when he is laid off, fears the reaction of his wife and becomes intensely depressed before finally consulting a psychologist. The psychologist, unfortunately, introduces Berman's second device: the Emotional House. The upshot: After getting fired, you need to rebuild your damaged Emotional House, which is constructed with the 7 C's of courage, confidence, choice, communication ... you get the picture. The metaphor quickly becomes annoying, since the points that it's used to illustrate are self-evident. Much more valuable are the self-quizzes that follow each chapter, which will certainly provide some much appreciated guidance to the recently downsized. It is primarily to this group that *BooksInShort* recommends Berman's book, although these days, it might not be a bad idea for everyone to keep a copy stashed away - just in case.

Take-Aways

- Losing a job undermines your whole emotional structure.
- A job loss can undermine your sense of security, especially if your identity is wrapped up in your job.
- You need to regain your stability and confidence to get another job and to choose it well.
- The key to regaining stability is rebuilding your Emotional House.
- Your Emotional House is the House of 7 Cs: courage, confidence, choice, change, communication, confrontation and control.
- Have the courage to confront what really happened and face your fears.
- Review your life, your strengths and your accomplishments to rebuild self-esteem.
- Get ready to let go and move on.
- Say goodbye to your old job by burning cards where unpleasant memories are written.
- Take control over where you are going next to get what you want.

Summary

The Crisis of Being Fired

In today's business climate, executives face an increased danger of losing a job due to competition, downsizing, restructuring and change. But although job loss may be more frequent than it once was, it is no easier. Losing your job can undermine your emotional structure and interfere with your ability to cope and enjoy life.

“Over the years, each person constructs a uniquely personal framework of emotions and attitudes. This is the emotional house in which he or she lives. If this house is on a firm foundation, embedded in good soil and solidly built, it will withstand all kinds of bad weather.”

One reason that job loss causes such a devastating impact is that you may feel guilty or sense that you have done something wrong. This loss undermines your feeling of security and confidence, especially if your identity is wrapped up in your job. You need to find a way to regain some stability so you can regain your confidence - the main ingredient in getting another job, especially the right job.

Rebuild Your "Emotional House"

The key to regaining this stability is rebuilding your "Emotional House." This is the internal emotional structure you have developed throughout your life. It affects how you perceive and function in the everyday world. If you have a strong emotional house, you respond well to difficulties and you feel "safe, secure, and protected from too much stress." However, a real crisis, such as being fired, is like a tremor in the earth, which causes your emotional house to shake and possibly even fall down.

“You're fired!” is the shot being heard around the world ... Your ability to cope, to function optimally, to enjoy your life, may indeed be in danger in the current business scene.”

When your emotional house is damaged, you need to rebuild it as soon as you can and make it strong and solid once more. What's more, the personal tools you most need to rebuild your emotional house - tools such as communication - are also often weakened or even vanquished by a job loss or other serious trauma. To get the rebuilding process going, you need to step away from the problem that left you feeling emotionally devastated. Then, you can look again at the components that make up your emotional house with more objectivity, so you can begin the rebuilding process.

Emotional Trauma

A job loss can be especially traumatic when you have worked someplace for a long time and have thrown so much of yourself into your job that it has become a major linchpin of your identity.

“No matter what the circumstances, you may feel that you have somehow been at fault.”

Bob, a 48-year-old administrator, worked for the Marter Corporation for 25 years. He rose steadily through the executive ranks. Then the company underwent a period of restructuring. His boss wished him "good luck" and he was laid off. For Bob, the unthinkable had happened. After 25 years, the relationship suddenly ended. In the passage of just a few moments, everything he felt he had been striving to achieve had crashed. He had literally sacrificed himself for the company, like many people in the corporate world. He had given up a lot of his time with his wife and two children, because he put the company first. Bob felt devastated. He didn't understand why he was fired. He agonized over what had gone wrong, feeling a mix of shame, guilt and fear. He tried to conceal the reality of what had happened from his wife and children for three weeks, because he felt he had failed them. Meanwhile, his emotional and physical health declined, until he finally went to see a psychologist, Dr. Loring.

“In order to pull yourself out of the doldrums and get on with your life, you need to find a way to regain some measure of stability.”

If you have ever experienced such a trauma, consider your own history with the company that rejected you and think about your reactions. Did you also feel shame, guilt and fear? How did you tell your family and friends what happened? Asking such questions

will help you better understand your own feelings.

Confronting the Reality

The first step in rebuilding your self-confidence is confronting the reality of what happened. Expressing your anger, bitterness and disbelief is the first step in coming to terms with this trauma. That's what Bob did when he decided to talk to Dr. Loring. By expressing his anger about being fired, he took "the first positive step in his journey from initial shock and depression to awakening, rebuilding and ultimately, taking charge of his own life once again."

"If you are to move ahead with your life, it is important for you to reconstruct your 'Emotional House.' In this way, you will regain the self-esteem that was shattered when you received your pink slip."

If you are ever in a similar situation, you should do the same. The sense that you have sustained a tremendous emotional blow is normal. When you lose your job or career, you may well feel that your whole identity is gone. You believe that your dreams of the future have been endangered, while your belief in yourself has been badly shaken. The result may be a combination of the feelings - loss, fear, shame, emptiness, disbelief and guilt - that are all part of depression. Depression can result from having intense anger, so you need to express it in appropriate ways to release the pressure that builds up from feeling so furious. Internally, you feel like you are losing yourself, dying inside and you don't want to admit it. Because you don't really want to believe what happened, you may deny it. For example, you are engaging in denial when you avoid telling members of your family.

"Your 'Emotional House' is the emotional structure you have built through all the years of your life. Its stability determines how well you respond to adversity."

However, confronting the reality of what happened is crucial to recuperating successfully. Only then can you start rebuilding your emotional house and regain your firm footing.

The Elements of Your Emotional House

Your emotional house is the "uniquely personal framework of emotions and attitudes" that you built up over the years as you matured. This framework functions like an emotional protector that surrounds you. If you have built a strong house on firm foundations and good soil, you will be able to withstand any kind of bad weather, such as a difficult experience. But if the structure is weak, or becomes weak for any reason, you need to rebuild it to protect yourself from the elements. Otherwise, the structure will continue to lose strength until it is so weak it could be overwhelmed by stress and become vulnerable to potential collapse.

"When your emotions are not free to handle the situation adequately, too much stress will cause the walls of your house to buckle and foundation to tremble. So the way you get better is to work on rebuilding your house."

You might think of this emotional house as the "house of the seven C's," because the name of each part of the house begins with a "C." The underlying soil on which you build is called courage, because you need a firm, compact soil on which to build any house, so it doesn't shift. You can feel frightened, even if you have courage, since being afraid simply means you are aware of danger. But facing reality and determining to do something about it reflects your courage.

"The site of this special house is called courage."

The next part of your house is the foundation of confidence or self-esteem.

Once you have your courage and confidence in place, you can begin building the first two walls of your emotional house: communication and confrontation. For example, you need courage to stop denying a painful reality and face it. But then, once you confront this reality, you can regain your confidence and can communicate about your feelings.

"The foundation of a house situated on the proper site supports the whole structure. The foundation is confidence."

The other two walls of your house are choice and change. A crisis always tests your emotional house, and in a crisis, you always experience change. When you face the crisis you stand at a crossroad, and must choose which path to take. As the Chinese say, any

crisis represents a combination of danger and opportunity.

“The house of the seven C’s is always tested on a crossroads. A crisis is a time in life which forces you to make a choice, the third wall of your house. You must decide which path you will take.”

The last part of your emotional house is control, which represents the roof. Control holds your emotional house together so you can function effectively.

Starting the Rebuilding Process

To start the rebuilding process, begin with the courage to face your fears. This way, you start to lessen the pressures you are feeling from your emotions, such as guilt and shame. At this stage, Bob found the courage to tell his wife exactly what happened. He faced the reality.

“Change, the fourth wall of your house, always occurs during a crisis. Holding this whole structure together is the roof, control.”

Stop hitting yourself over the head for doing something wrong. There is no point in blaming yourself for a poor performance on the job when you know other factors were at play, such as limited resources or the politics of decisions made by those in charge.

Take steps to rebuild your confidence. Look back over your life and think about your background, family and hopes and dreams for the future. Reaching a deeper understanding of who you are and what you want will help you attain increased self-esteem and confidence. This will also prove to you that you are not just your job. Rebuilding confidence in yourself as a "multifaceted" person is critical, since you need positive feelings about your identity to have a firm belief in yourself. This confidence combines with courage to provide the basis for rebuilding your emotional house.

To help gain courage and confidence, ask yourself questions about events at your company before you were dismissed. Were you involved in any decision-making? How did you show your dedication to the company on the job? Draw a lifeline of all the major events in your life, both positive and negative. Think about everything you accomplished.

Consider the ways you have contributed to your employers, your community and your family. List the attributes and qualities you have now that will help you regain your confidence. Replenishing your confidence in yourself is "vital before you go out and find another job - the right job."

Let Go, Move On and Take Control

Take some steps to let go of the past. At this point, Dr. Loring advised Bob to try driving by his old company and saying "goodbye," as if he was bidding an old friend farewell. Although it may be painful, you have to do it. Over time, as you find new friends, you will miss your old friend increasingly less.

Rather than letting regrets about the past creep up on you, make a choice. Seize control by deciding when to have these thoughts. This way you can choose when you want to mourn for what you have lost. Then, when you do, you can feel as unhappy as you want.

During this mourning time, you can overcome your feelings of loss several ways. One strategy is to write your pleasant and unpleasant memories on index cards. Then, sort them in two piles. Keep the pleasant ones as a source of future learning. And burn the unpleasant memories, in a kind of goodbye ritual. This process is like attending a funeral and witnessing the conclusion of everything you didn’t like about your old company. Going through this process will help you to move on to another job.

Any change can cause a sense of loss, because you aren’t allowed to keep all the familiar things that help you feel secure. You have to adjust, so any transition carries some stress.

However, your attitude can ease the process of change. If you look at change in terms of loss, you will feel very anxious and even afraid. However, if you look at it as an opportunity, you will feel excited, stimulated and eager to meet that new challenge. By adopting this outlook, you see change as an impetus for growth, revitalization and new horizons.

After you have said goodbye to your past, you are ready to meet your future. Now you can exercise control. You are back in charge.

About the Author

Dr. Eileen L. Berman, a licensed psychologist, has practiced clinical and corporate psychology and management consulting in the U.S. and Australia. For ten years, she wrote a monthly column on stress and productivity for *Business Digest* and published the *CEO Growletter*. She now writes a monthly column for *Industrial Management* magazine and is the author of *Building Productivity: 18 Blueprints for Success* and *Dealing Effectively With Job Loss*.
