

Even if you've been spared during this recession, it's no fun seeing someone you care about thrown into emotional upheaval because she's worried about losing her job. It's even more distressing when it's someone you work with.

Of course you want to help, but what do you say? You both know that your job is secure, so will your reassurances and sympathies just cause resentment?

Here's the short answer: If you care about this person, you must offer support even if it makes you uncomfortable. Staying silent or ignoring the elephant in the room will only make things worse for her.

Dealing with the Bad News

Hearing that they may be let go is devastating and can leave employees in a state of shock. Keep your strategy simple while your coworker processes the news--reach out, make yourself available, and listen. That's it. Doing anything else during this time is counterproductive.

If job loss is a possibility rather than a certainty, add helping your coworker stay focused on her day-to-day job duties to your list. Distraction and undue worry turn possible outcomes into self-fulfilling prophecies.

Long-Term Care Strategies

After the initial shock of the news has passed, you'll have more ways to provide a helping hand. There are two ways to support your coworker—emotionally and practically. You should do both.

Emotional Support

Put it into perspective: It's hard to see the big picture when you're scared and angry. Your coworker will be both. Help her avoid obsessing over worse-case, doomsday scenarios.

Keep it real: Maintaining perspective does not mean putting a happy face on bad events. Impending job loss is no picnic. Acknowledge and respect her feelings.

Build self-esteem: Losing your job is a tremendous emotional blow. Relentlessly build up your coworker with positive affirmations



and continuous reminders of her abilities and accomplishments.

Intervene to deter negativity: Don't feed into her anger and resentment by being your coworker's venting buddy. Instead, steer conversations into positive territory. Shield your coworker from doom-and-gloom coworkers.

Communicate carefully: Never ask open questions such as, "How will you pay the mortgage?" Instead, gently probe areas of concern and offer to help: "Is your resume current? Would you like help with that? Would you like me to put you in touch with a good service? Have you contacted the EAP?"

Tips for Support

Make an action plan: Get specific! Taking care of details is empowering. Help your coworker prepare a list of concerns and start problem-solving.

Supporting Coworkers

Anticipating Job Loss

Help with budgeting: Encourage your coworker to start slashing expenses now, instead of waiting.

Use your network: Get the word out early that your coworker will be available for hire and start connecting her with professionals in your network.

Suggest retraining: Find out what your coworker's potential employers are looking for and help her uncover areas of weakness that she can improve upon before beginning her job search.

Help identify your coworker's unique strengths and talents. Everyone has them, but they're usually more easily spotted by outsiders. Clarifying core competencies makes it possible to expand job searches into new, sometimes surprising areas that offer better prospects.

Offer your time and/or expertise: Solve at least one problem for your coworker. Does she need instructions on how to use a job search site? What about help with child care when she's interviewing for a new job? Find out where you can help, and make a commitment to do so.

Heads Up for Those Helping

- After the initial burst of sympathy and concern, support from others often dries up, so check in often with your coworker, both at work and at home (if you have a close relationship).
- Monitor for signs of depression, such as listlessness, disengagement, or frequently missing work, and intervene if there's a problem by pointing your coworker to your company's Employee Assistance Program.