

# FOR YOUR PRACTICE

## LAWYERS CONCERNED FOR LAWYERS

### Once comfortable on the way up, lawyer is at loss after layoff

*Q. My legal career had been more or less blessed since law school. A year ago, I was moving up the ladder at my firm, comfortable and knowledgeable in my area of specialization, and, although working too many hours, generally pleased with how things were going. But some months after the onset of the economic meltdown, I was one of the victims of a significant downsizing of the firm. After the shock wore off, I put out some feelers, but got no response, and have somewhat abruptly felt stripped of my professional identity as I spend more time laundering briefs than preparing them. Thank goodness, my wife still has her job, and fortunately, some of our mutual funds have bounced some of the way back, but even so, my thoughts are dominated by financial worries. It's getting so I almost*

*don't feel like I can call myself an attorney, and it's time to consider a job at the hardware chain, but they're not hiring either. I've been spending a lot more time isolated in the house. How do people cope with this situation?*

**A.** A layoff, at any time, can be a real blow to your self-esteem and career identity (which, for many of us, can feel like the main way we define ourselves), not to mention finances (especially if accustomed to and relying on a considerable income), housing, plans, etc. You are entitled to lick your wounds for a time, but withdrawing from others is usually a mistake, which can lead to depression/inertia, often leading to more withdrawal, etc. There's no way that unemployment isn't stressful; for some, the stress is com-

pounded by shame, but if there's any silver lining to the worldwide financial crisis, it's that you have so much company that your job status is much less likely to be judged in a personal way. The uncertainty, financial and otherwise, is also fertile ground for unbounded anxiety, which can be immobilizing.

A recent series of blogs by LCL's director ([lclma.blogspot.com](http://lclma.blogspot.com)) offers a wider array of coping suggestions than we have space for here, but a key thread in her recommendations is that you counteract the impulse to hibernate and instead reinforce your connections with others. Maintain mutually supportive ties with others (and there are many this time around) who share your plight. One way to do that is through programs offered by bar associations and, for example, LCL, where we plan to repeat our recent presentation/discussion series designed for unemployed attorneys. Have lunch once a week with a colleague in the same position to brainstorm together, confide in one another and cheer each other on. Connect with peers from past jobs and law school, as well as those who have served as mentors. Get involved in bar association committees, community groups, boards, volunteering opportunities, etc. — these activities will not only keep people mindful of what you have to offer as a worker and collaborator or leader (and you never know when that will plant a seed that later pays off professionally), but will remove you from the passive mode, so that you can return to experiencing yourself as impactful.



It is also helpful to keep a daily routine, and take good care of yourself — for this period when you control more of your own time, you have a chance to pay attention to nutrition, exercise, perhaps relaxation/meditation, as well as the activities you really enjoy and may have neglected, such as music, movies, dance, theatre (check [ArtsBoston.org](http://ArtsBoston.org) for a plethora of inexpensive options). We know how hard it can be to allow yourself these pleasures when your mind is full of worry about your future, but this crisis will pass, and why not use the time to enrich yourself in non-monetary ways for which you may not have much time down the road.

If, despite such efforts, you find yourself immobilized by anxiety or depression, or heading in a bad direction with alcohol or drugs, give LCL a call. We can't manufacture a job, but we'll direct you toward whatever kinds of help might meet your needs. That's what we're here for.

*Questions quoted are either actual letters/e-mails or paraphrased and disguised concerns expressed by individuals seeking assistance from Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers.*

*Questions for LCL may be mailed to LCL, 31 Milk St., Suite 810, Boston, MA 02109; e-mailed to [email@lclma.org](mailto:email@lclma.org) or called in to (617) 482-9600. LCL's licensed clinicians will respond in confidence. Visit LCL online at [www.lclma.org](http://www.lclma.org). ■*

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FOR THE ISSUES OF LIFE IN LAW

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Section, division and committee participation is the best way to enhance your MBA membership. Join us at this free event to learn how to become involved in the MBA's sections and division.

Meet the chairs and section council members in an informal setting while networking with colleagues with similar interests. Cocktails and hors d'oeuvres will be served.