



LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS: EASING THE PRESSURE OF LAYOFFS

We are seeing more and more layoffs lately. For examples, see the articles – “Facebook-parent Meta planning fresh layoffs, to impact thousands” (*The Economic Times*, February 23, 2023) or “Tech layoffs in 2023 are feeding a new startup surge” (*Wired*, February 22, 2023). This is an uncomfortable time for thousands of people as they try to cope with the stress of the unknown, the financial challenges, and the disruption to routine.

We have all been through a layoff or know someone who has been through one—or is going through one now. Common as layoffs are, we rarely talk about the associated survivor guilt, which is a very real phenomenon. People may think, “Yeah, how hard can it be? You got to keep your job!”

The reality is that keeping your job when others lose their jobs can create PTSD-like symptoms. Leaders can do a great deal to focus on the well-being of the people who survive the layoff.

SOME CONSIDERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Consideration/ issue	What a leader can do...
Fear that they are next on the layoff list.	Keep people informed. Don't be afraid to overcommunicate. Be transparent and ask your people what you can do to be supportive of them. Be present and be visible.
The workplace is a source of friendships and community. This is true even when people are traveling and working from home. It is painful to see someone you care about let go.	Make sure employees know that mental health professionals are available for them to talk to about their pain and anxiety, and ensure that they know how to access these counseling or other stress relief programs, e.g., Employee Assistance Plan (EAP).
You haven't replaced the person being let go and therefore you rely more heavily on “survivors” on your team to fill in the gaps (i.e., “Do more with less.”).	Ensure you are reprioritizing so that you don't burn out those who remain. Take care to explain why you are asking someone to do a specific project or task, what you expect, how you will help, and when they will get additional support.
Stress – people need to be free to express how they feel and what they need.	Keeping or creating a culture of psychological safety during a layoff is challenging. Ensure that you are using all the tools in your toolkit: candor, trust building, open dialogue and more. Look for ways to demonstrate more flexibility and compassion. For more information, see <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leadership Effectiveness: Psychological Safety• Leadership Effectiveness: Candor• Leadership Effectiveness: Always Have a Door Open for Upward Feedback• Leadership Effectiveness Helping Your Direct Reports Focus and Engage

Make sure your survivors know how much they are valued. Do you have a plan to ensure you don't burn out your best performers?

Further reading:

- [Layoffs Are Painful. But You Can Communicate Them Compassionately | hbr.org](#)
- [How to Support Your Remaining Employees After a Layoff | hbr.org](#)
- [After Layoffs, Help Survivors Be More Effective | hbr.org](#)
- [Lock In Top Future Employees By Keeping Talent Amid Layoffs | investors.com](#)
- [Preparing to Announce Layoffs in a Virtual Meeting | hbr.org](#)
- [Facebook layoffs: Facebook-parent Meta planning fresh layoffs, to impact thousands: report | The Economic Times](#)
- [Tech Layoffs in 2023 Are Feeding a New Startup Surge | WIRED](#)