

THE RETAIL RD

JOB LOSS AND RECOVERY How to Survive and Thrive

By Barbara Ruhs, MS, RD

“Success is not final, failure is not fatal; it is the courage to continue that counts.” — Winston Churchill

Losing a job can happen to anyone. However, if you're unprepared for such an occurrence, it can be even more stressful and difficult to cope with.

In an ideal world, performance and producing value would offer job security. However, the highly competitive nature of the supermarket industry means that retailers are constantly evolving to survive. In this highly volatile environment, changes in leadership and strategy can lead to the untimely and unpredictable demise of retail RD positions. In addition, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, job turnover in this field typically is higher than other employment sectors.

The good news is that younger generations are destigmatizing the notion of changing jobs frequently. In fact, “job hopping,” or switching jobs every few years by personal choice, is the norm for millennials, who are more focused on finding the “right” job that offers work-life balance and a positive work culture.

In contrast to past generations that spent decades at the same employer, today's workers spend an average of four years on the job. Whether you get fired, your position gets eliminated, or you decide it's time for a change, it's best to have a plan in place.

This article offers advice on how to prepare for job loss and suggests several questions to ponder when evaluating your current position and searching for future employment.

Sudden Job Loss

There are practical steps to take to prepare yourself for an unexpected firing or layoff. First and foremost, separate personal and professional computers, files, and e-mails. This may seem inconvenient, but in the long term it can eliminate the headache of recreating files such as résumés and work samples. Invest in an external drive that's kept up to date regularly (weekly/monthly) to store any files on the go.

Although it may seem obvious, updating your résumé and LinkedIn profile with new job skills or accomplishments at least every few months is a great way to ensure you're prepared. Although social networks are a great way to increase the number of your connections, it's also important to network the old-fashioned way by making meaningful face-to-face connections in the workplace, at conferences, and with partnering organizations.

There are many retail personnel with whom RDs regularly interact who can offer invaluable insights and exposure to different aspects of the food business. Learning about marketing, community and public relations, category management, regulatory compliance, and the use of syndicated data tools are segments of the retail food business that provide opportunities

for RDs. Get to know corporate and store team personnel, collaborate with foodservice and chefs, and interact with food industry professionals such as brand managers, marketing managers, and public relations personnel as well as in-house corporate RDs who can open doors to career opportunities beyond the supermarket.

Evaluating Jobs and Potential Employers

If you haven't had the “blessing” of a job loss that propelled you back to school or down a different career path, take the time to evaluate your current job and employer—it can help you decide whether it's time to start looking for a new job. If you're feeling stuck or undervalued, don't waste valuable emotional energy or squander the chance to advance your career.

Consider the following questions when evaluating your current employment situation or a possible job opportunity:

- Is the RD role championed and integrated throughout all aspects of health and wellness functions at the company?
- Is the compensation commensurate with job duties, level of responsibility, years of education, and experience? Are performance-based incentives—similar to those of other employees functioning at the same level—offered?
- Does the employer support professional development? Are there opportunities to advance your career, knowledge, and skills?
- Do managers empower staff to perform their best? Does the management style and job culture support your work style (such as flexible work schedules or working remotely)?
- Does the employer have a high turnover rate? What do current and past employees have to say about the work environment and leadership?
- Are there leaders or mentors who are willing to help you learn new skills or help to advance your role and position in the company?
- Does the employer require you to sign a work contract that provides little or no protection from termination without cause?

Coping With Job Loss

Although losing a job often is shrouded in shame or embarrassment, it's also an opportunity for growth and career development. Take the time to reflect on the experience to help avoid missing the warning signs in the future. No matter what the situation, try not to be too hard on yourself and make the important investment in self-care and healing that will prepare you to move forward stronger and smarter.

— Barbara Ruhs, MS, RD, is the president and owner of the MarketRD.com, a consulting firm specializing in retail health and wellness strategy and nutrition communications.