



A Primer on What Not to Do When You Find Yourself Out of Work

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Cheat Sheet:

- **Prioritize mental and physical well-being.** Don't wallow — seek support, move your body, and prioritize your well-being.
- **Prepare your finances.** Cut out unnecessary expenses, file for unemployment immediately, and don't assume a short jobless stretch.
- **Stay connected.** Network with others. Join supportive communities and engage in conversations to uplift you.
- **Be strategic in your job search.** Please. Don't. Over. Apply. Be intentional, tailor your resume, and find an accountability partner to keep you motivated.

Before COVID-19, I was general counsel of a state-licensed cannabis company in Las Vegas, Nevada, USA. I loved my job and the people that I worked with. My job was challenging and always interesting. I would have stayed there for a very, very long time. But then, COVID-19 hit.

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, the US federal government initiated the Paycheck Protection Plan, along with many other plans and policies to support citizens and businesses. Unfortunately, there was no PPP money available for folks in the cannabis industry. While cannabis was legal at the state level in many states, the federal government was not on board. I was laid off in March 2020. As the second highest paid person in the company, eliminating my salary allowed the company to save the job of five lower paid employees. Logically — makes perfect sense; personally — devastating.

I was out of work for 11 months and it was one of the most painful times in my life. It was made more painful by navigating unemployment without a guide, someone to tell me the pitfalls to avoid. If you find yourself out of work, I hope that you can learn from my mistakes without repeating them.

Explore [ACC's Career Corner](#) for access to career coaching, online courses, professional development tools, and a supportive community designed to empower in-house counsel at every stage of their career.

Prioritize your mental health

Less than three months prior to being laid off I had a glowing review from the head of the company. I did a great job, and my efforts directly and positively impacted my workplace. My colleagues all got along with me, and I looked forward to going into work. It was truly a dream job for an in-house attorney.

I was shocked when I was laid off. SHOCKED! I know it can happen to anyone, and I should have seen it coming, but ... I didn't. Being laid off shook me to my core because of how much I enjoyed my job and how well I had been doing in my role. My shock eventually turned to anger and grief which rolled right into depression. I wallowed in my depression — ate too much, drank too much alcohol, and watched too much TV (literally all 15 seasons of Supernatural — that's 327 episodes). None of this helped my mental health. Rather my downward spiral got worse because of the poor choices I made.

My advice would be to give yourself a reasonable time to grieve. Many of us define ourselves by our job, job title, or role as attorneys. When that is taken from us, we become a bit unmoored. I should have recognized that I needed professional help with my depression when my grief spiraled. I should have reached out to a therapist to talk through what I was feeling and to get me back on track. Or, I could have even reached out to my primary care physician for some pharmaceutical assistance. If you are a religious person, many denominations have religious leaders who help tend to their flock's mental health. Remember that most, if not all, states have a Lawyers Assistance Program that will be happy to help you on a confidential basis. Any of these steps are better than what I did no wallowing!

Protect your physical health

All that eating and drinking? Yep — that lead to excessive weight gain. The weight gain led to physically feeling bad — my knees hurt, my back hurt, I was "low energy." And I know that this is not news to anyone, but it takes a lot longer to get the weight off than it does to put that weight on.

I excused my lack of physical activity because it was too hot to get outside, or I couldn't afford a gym membership due to not having a paycheck, or any other excuse I could find. Some of us will always

find an excuse to avoid what we don't like to do. I don't like exercising — I did not like it then and I do not like it now. However, I now appreciate exercise and the results that come with it. It took me a long time, but the excess weight is gone. My knees don't hurt anymore, and I am no longer “low energy.”

Your physical health is just as important as your mental health. Many studies have shown that physical activity enhances mental health. Movement helps release endorphins, known as the “happy hormone,” lowers blood pressure and helps with weight loss which leads to increased self-esteem. So, no wallowing — get moving!

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Get smart with your money

When I was laid off, I could not conceive of being out of work for longer than a few months. Everyone say it with me: “Inconceivable!” (IYKYK!) My failure to recognize COVID-19 as a paradigm-shifting, worldwide pandemic led me to make less than stellar choices with my money. Looking back, keeping my son in private school — expensive private school and it was third grade — was not a wise financial move. I get it if it is high school — I really do. In retrospect, it was an expense that led to stress and that could have been placed on hold until I was employed again.

I also waited to file for unemployment. This was a massive mistake as there were record numbers of citizens filing for unemployment in Las Vegas and across the state of Nevada. Every day there were more folks filing and there was eventually an ungodly backlog of thousands of Nevadans trying to get unemployment. It was a sh*t show (this is, in fact, a technical legal term y'all). I was a lucky person who understood where there is a will, there is a way. I reached out to my local elected officials with my well-documented timeline and history of attempts to move my filing forward — one of them must have shaken something loose because I started receiving my unemployment checks soon thereafter. But don't make the mistake of waiting — file your unemployment claim as soon as possible. Each state (and country!) has a different system, please check your state's website for FAQs on filing for unemployment.

[ACC Resource: Questions to Ask Your Interviewer](#)

Don't retreat from the world



Join [ACC's Small Law Department Network's Brown Bag Lunch](#) meetings to connect and find strength together.

My depression and weight gain fed on themselves — I was depressed so I ate, I gained weight, so I was depressed. I did not feel good physically or mentally and avoided people on the limited occasions that I could interact during the COVID-19 restrictions. To give myself a little grace, there were still a lot of restrictions on physical interaction for quite some time. But I know that I could have made more of an effort to come out of my shell and meet the world.

I wish that I had reached out to more people for support. I reached out to one person and was ghosted — I let that get me down (adding to my depression) and keep me from trying to continue to reach out to others. I allowed that experience to justify my retreat from the world and continue wallowing.

For anyone who knows someone out of work — don't be afraid to talk to them. We know you are not a Magic Job Fairy with a perfect job waiting for us. We also know that it can be awkward, and you are worried about saying the wrong thing. Many of us just need some normalcy — what movie did you watch recently? What is going on with your kids? How did you get your tomatoes to grow so well in your garden? A little conversation goes a long way to making folks feel normal.

A new way to network with others going through your same situation is to join one of the [Small Law Department Network's Brown Bag Lunch meetings](#). These meetings provide space for folks who are unemployed to discuss issues, form strategies, and gain strength from each other. [Please check the ACC website for the dates and times of these meetings.](#)

[Join the next Brown Bag Lunch on June 30! ACC Members register for free!](#)

Don't over-apply

In addition to wallowing in my depression, I was suffering from severe anxiety and felt that I had to put my name in as many hats as possible. I probably applied to over a thousand jobs. After the first few months of being out of work, if a new job popped up on any job board I applied. I was not smart or strategic. I was panicked and hasty.

My lack of strategy led to a lack of preparation. I know that my over application hurt my chances of being hired. In hindsight, I should have followed the advice that we have all received: target those jobs that you are at least 70 percent qualified for, tweak your resume to suit the position, research the company, try to network your way to move your resume to the top of the pile, craft a compelling cover letter, etc.

Over-applying wasted my time on jobs that were not well-suited for me and wasted valuable time that I should have used to follow the advice above. Please. Don't. Over. Apply.

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Allow yourself to be productive but don't over-volunteer

While I was waiting for a response to one of my many applications, I felt like I was only allowed to "work" on getting a job. I had overwhelming guilt if I did anything productive other than searching and applying for jobs. Reorganize my closet = nope, too productive. Clean up the yard = nope, too productive. Study for a certificate = nope, way too productive! Lay on the couch and eat ice cream with chocolate sauce and watch Supernatural = okay, acceptable "self-care" time as a break from over-applying.

Looking back on this time in my life, I know that I should have given myself more structure. I should have leaned into smaller productive activities to boost my sense of accomplishment and satisfaction at completing something worthwhile, rather than wallowing.

If you are inclined and have the opportunity, I recommend finding a charity you can volunteer at or a legal aid organization where you can provide pro bono legal services. However, be cautious and set firm boundaries; sometimes folks think that your time is up for grabs because you are out of work. Looking for a job IS a full-time job. Volunteering a few hours per week is a great way to be productive and keep your skills sharp.

Get an accountability partner

This is probably the biggest regret that I have for myself related to this time. Meeting with someone who would have kept me accountable to myself and focused on my job search, would have kept me away from the TV (for at least a few hours).

What is an accountability partner? Well, it is not someone who is a mentor, coach, or a therapist. It is someone who meets with you periodically to listen to you vent and asks you what you are doing on your job search. Have you cleaned up your resume? Did you find anyone at Job X that went to your alma mater and might be willing to submit your resume? Did you talk to that recruiter you mentioned last time? The goal with an accountability partner is to have someone on your side who can gently (or

maybe not so gently) nudge you when the job search feels like a grind, and you want to give up. To get you started, the SLD Network In-Transition Committee has developed an accountability partner program to help you find someone to work with during this time. Keep an eye on the ACC website for more information.

While you are on the website, please take a look at the career resources available, including the [In-Transition Checklist](#). They are there to help you, no matter where you might be in your career journey. ACC also has a new resource, the [Well-being Toolkit for In House Lawyers](#), that has curated many great wellness resources for you.

At this point, it should be entirely clear to you, dear reader, that you should avoid following in my footsteps. Please take my advice and don't do what I did. I wish you luck!

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