FREE GUIDE

Layoff Survival Guide

What to do next so you can recover, reposition, and land faster.

> You are not starting from zero. You are starting from experience.

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START HERE

A layoff is a business event. Do not let it become a career identity.

Roles get cut for headcount, reorganisation, funding and strategy reasons that have nothing to do with how well you did the work. Being rattled is a normal response to a sudden change in income and routine. It is not evidence about your ability.

The risk in the first week is not inaction. It is reaction: taking the first role you see, dropping your level, or rewriting your career story around the layoff.

The order that works

1. **Stabilise**
   Give yourself a defined window to process, then stop.
2. **Capture**
   Write down the evidence before it fades.
3. **Reposition**
   Decide what you are aiming at, not just what you were.
4. **Search**
   Work warm paths before cold ones.
5. **Prepare**
   Build the story bank and practise out loud.
6. **Interview**
   Start with lower-stakes rounds, not your first choice.

For unemployment insurance, health coverage and retraining support, use the official routes: dol.gov/agencies/eta/layoffs/workers and careeronestop.org. Eligibility and timing vary by state and by your specific situation, so this guide does not attempt to summarise them.

ONE

The first 48 hours

One job this week matters more than any application: get the evidence out of your head and onto paper while you still have it.

Details fade faster than you think.

Within a month you will remember what you were responsible for and have lost the numbers, the dates, the names and the reason you chose one approach over another. Those specifics are the entire difference between a believable interview answer and a vague one.

- Give yourself a fixed window to be angry about it. Put an end date on it.
- Write down every project you can recall, before you tidy anything up.
- Capture scale: users, revenue, requests, team size, budget, uptime.
- Record the technical decisions you made and what you rejected.
- Note where you led, owned or unblocked something.
- List the people who saw your work. You will need them in a fortnight.

> **BE CAREFUL HERE**
>
> Keep your own record of your accomplishments, written in your own words. Do not take confidential, proprietary or customer data, source code, or internal documents. What you may keep depends on your employment agreement and local law — if you are unsure, write the facts from memory rather than exporting files.

ONE · WORKSHEET

Capture one project now

Do this for your three strongest projects. Twenty minutes each, today.

Project

Problem

My role

Scale

Decision

Impact

Metric

People involved

TWO

Build your brag bank

People remember their responsibilities and forget their evidence. An interviewer cannot score a responsibility. Build the bank once and you will draw on it for every application, every profile rewrite and every interview for the next three months.

Projects shipped
What went live, and when

Hard problems solved
The ones with no obvious answer

Promotions
And what changed to earn them

Conflict
Disagreements you worked through

Customer impact
Who was better off

Measurable outcomes
Numbers you can defend

Recognition
Praise, awards, being asked back

Leadership
Even without the title

Failures
And what you changed afterwards

Scope
Systems, teams, budget, blast radius

WHAT HAPPENED	EVIDENCE / NUMBER	WHO SAW IT

THREE

Tell your network early

Most people wait until their resume is perfect before telling anyone. That costs weeks, and the resume is never perfect. Tell people early: warm introductions take time to mature, and the ones you start now land when you are ready to interview.

> **WHAT A REFERRAL ACTUALLY DOES**
>
> A referral does not make an unqualified application succeed. What it does is get a human to look at all, and attach a small amount of someone else's credibility to your name. That is usually enough to surface a borderline application that the cold queue would never reach.

TIER 1	**Former managers, close peers, mentors**	Tell them this week. Be direct.
TIER 2	**Cross-functional partners, former colleagues, customers where appropriate**	Tell them over the next two weeks.
TIER 3	**Broader network**	One clear public post, then let it work.

Ask for a specific thing. "Let me know if you hear anything" gives the other person nothing to act on.

THREE · TEMPLATES

Three messages you can send today

Adapt the brackets. Keep them short; a long message reads as a bigger ask.

TO A FORMER MANAGER

Hi [name] — my role was impacted in a recent round of cuts. I am starting to look at [role type] positions. Working on [specific project] with you was the part I enjoyed most, and I would value your read on where my background fits now. Would you be open to a short call in the next week or two?

TO A PEER

Hey [name] — I was caught in the layoff at [company]. I am focusing on [role type] roles in [domain]. If your team or anyone you know is hiring for that, I would appreciate you keeping me in mind. Happy to send my CV.

TO A WEAKER CONNECTION

Hi [name] — we worked together briefly on [thing]. My role was affected by a recent restructuring and I am exploring [role type] roles. No ask beyond this: if you hear of something that fits [specific strength], I would be glad to hear about it.

FOUR

100 random applications is not a strategy.

Volume feels like progress because it produces activity. It mostly produces rejection emails, and it makes every application worse because none of them are tailored. Narrow first.

1. Pick two or three role types you would genuinely accept.
2. Decide the company type: stage, size, domain, how it makes money.
3. Fix your constraints: level, location, compensation floor.
4. Build a list of 25 to 40 named companies, not a job board search.
5. For each one, look for a warm path before you consider applying cold.

Define it before you search

Target role	**Target level**
Industries	**Company stage**
Location	**Must-have**
Nice to have	**Deal breakers**

FIVE

Build a real search system

A job search is a system, not a mood.

On a bad week the search stops entirely, and on a good week it is frantic. A written pipeline removes the decision about what to do today, which is most of what makes it exhausting.

Target › Contact › Referral › Application › Recruiter › Interview › Follow-up › Offer

COMPANY	ROLE	CONTACT	REFERRAL?	APPLIED	STAGE	NEXT ACTION	FOLLOW-UP

A spreadsheet is enough. The point is that nothing depends on you remembering it, and that you can see at a glance which stage is empty.

SIX

Rewrite your resume now

Responsibility is not impact.

Most bullets describe the job description rather than the person who held it. Rewrite them now, while you still remember the numbers.

ACTION + SCOPE + COMPLEXITY + RESULT

SOFTWARE ENGINEER

BEFORE

Worked on payment systems.

AFTER

Led the migration of card authorisation to a new provider across 3 services, holding dual-write during cutover, and cut failed payments from 2.1% to 0.4%.

ENGINEERING MANAGER

BEFORE

Managed a team of 8.

AFTER

Took over a team of 8 with a 14-week median cycle time, introduced trunk-based release and on-call rotation, and brought it to 5 weeks over two quarters with no attrition.

DATA / AI

BEFORE

Built machine learning models.

AFTER

Replaced a rules-based fraud screen with a gradient-boosted model, built the offline eval set from 200k historical disputes, and held precision at 0.91 while recall rose 18 points.

PRODUCT MANAGER

BEFORE

Owned the mobile roadmap.

AFTER

Cut the mobile roadmap from 11 initiatives to 3 after interviewing 25 churned accounts, and shipped the top one in 6 weeks; activation rose from 31% to 44%.

Use numbers you can defend. If you cannot remember exactly, say what changed rather than inventing a figure: what was adopted, what stopped happening, what the team does differently now.

SEVEN

Fix your LinkedIn

Recruiters search LinkedIn with keywords. If your profile describes a job you no longer want, that is what you will be contacted about.

[What I am] + [domain strength] + [what I want next]

> **Backend engineer · payments and high-volume transaction systems · open to staff roles**

> **Engineering manager · platform teams and reliability · looking for a 15–30 person org**

- [ ] **Headline**
  Use the formula. Do not spend it on your old job title alone.
- [ ] **About**
  Three short paragraphs: what you do, the evidence, what you want next.
- [ ] **Latest role**
  Put an end date on it. An open-ended role reads as out of date.
- [ ] **Accomplishments**
  Move your strongest brag-bank entries in, with numbers.
- [ ] **Skills**
  Match the words real postings use, not internal job titles.
- [ ] **Recommendations**
  Ask now, while colleagues still remember the detail.
- [ ] **Open to Work**
  Recruiter-only or public — both are valid. Choose deliberately.

LinkedIn's own guidance is to update the profile BEFORE announcing anything, because the announcement is what sends people to look at it. The green banner is optional; a profile that matches the roles you want is not.

EIGHT

Six behavioural stories

You do not need fifty memorised answers. You need six real situations you know well enough to adapt, because most behavioural questions are a different door into the same small set of experiences.

1 **Ownership**
Something you drove to a finish that was not formally yours

2 **Conflict**
A disagreement you worked through, with the other side represented fairly

3 **Failure**
Something that went wrong, and what you changed afterwards

4 **Ambiguity**
A decision made without enough information

5 **Influence**
Getting a change through without authority

6 **Perseverance**
A long, hard project that nearly did not land

Use the same frame for each

Context | Challenge | Decision | Actions | Result | Reflection

Say "I" for the decisions and "we" for the outcome. Hiding your own contribution inside the team is the most common way a strong story scores badly.

NINE

Your 60-second intro

You will give this answer in every first conversation. Write it once and practise it out loud.

Who I am	One line. Current identity, not your whole history.
What I have done	Two or three sentences, weighted to the last five years.
What I am strongest at	The thing you want to be hired for.
What I want next	Specific enough to be actionable.

> WORKED EXAMPLE
>
> I am a backend engineer, about eight years in, mostly payments infrastructure. At [company] I owned the authorisation path — the part that has to be right at 3am — and led the migration to a new provider last year. What I am strongest at is making high-volume systems behave predictably under failure. I am looking for a staff-level role where that is the central problem rather than a side effect.

Answering "why are you looking?"

Short, factual, not defensive, and pointed forward. Do not editorialise about the company, your manager or the process. The interviewer is listening for whether this will be a distraction, and the fastest way to settle that is to answer in one sentence and move on.

> *My role was impacted as part of a broader restructuring. I am now looking for a role where I can bring my payments and reliability experience to a team that is scaling.*

TEN

Start mock interviews early

Do not let your first-choice company be your first practice round.

Interviewing is a separate skill from the job, and it degrades when unused. The first two or three are always the worst. Spend them somewhere it does not matter.

1. **Self-record**
   Answer out loud to a phone camera. Painful, fastest feedback available.
2. **Peer mock**
   Someone in your field who will tell you the truth.
3. **Lower-priority interview**
   A real loop you would accept but are not attached to.
4. **Structured mock**
   A full round under time pressure.
5. **Target companies**
   Now.

Cover the formats your loop will use

Coding · System design · Behavioural · Manager / leadership · Role-specific depth

Adapt to your role. A PM does not need a coding round; an EM usually needs more behavioural depth than they expect.

ELEVEN

A weekly cadence

Consistency beats frantic bursts.

A job search does not need ten hours a day, and at that pace it collapses within a fortnight. Two to four focused hours on weekdays sustains for months, which is the timescale that actually matters.

Monday	Find target roles. Send outreach.
Tuesday	Applications. Interview prep.
Wednesday	Network follow-ups. One mock.
Thursday	Applications. Technical practice.
Friday	Pipeline review. Follow-ups. Story practice.

Weekends off. Treat it as a job, including the part where the job stops.

TWELVE

When you feel stuck

Where the search breaks tells you what to fix. Find your row before changing anything else.

No recruiter calls

POSITIONING, RESUME OR TARGETING

Rewrite the headline and top third of the CV. Narrow the target list.

Calls, no onsite

RECRUITER SCREEN OR ROLE FIT

Tighten the 60-second intro. Check you are aiming at the right level.

Onsites, no offers

INTERVIEW EXECUTION

More mocks. Record yourself. Work the story bank, not more applications.

Offers, wrong ones

TARGETING OR LEVEL

You are converting. Aim higher and be more selective about who you talk to.

THE CHECKLIST

Everything, on one page

Screenshot this one.

- [ ] Record your wins while they are fresh
- [ ] Build the brag bank
- [ ] Tell your inner circle
- [ ] Ask for recommendations
- [ ] Rewrite the resume
- [ ] Update LinkedIn
- [ ] Choose two or three target roles
- [ ] Build a 25–40 company list
- [ ] Create the search tracker
- [ ] Build six behavioural stories
- [ ] Write and practise the intro
- [ ] Start mock interviews
- [ ] Review the pipeline weekly

You are not starting from zero.

You are starting from experience.

The work you did last month is the same work you did the month before the layoff. What changed is the employer, not the engineer. The job now is to get the evidence out of your head, point it at the right targets, and practise saying it out loud until it sounds like the truth it is.

NEXT

Be interview ready

The free guide takes one real behavioural answer apart line by line, then rewrites it. It is the companion to page nine of this one.

https://askgurpreet.com/interview-ready/

If you want help mapping your next move:

https://askgurpreet.com/coaching/

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SOURCES

U.S. Department of Labor — layoff resources for workers — **dol.gov/agencies/eta/layoffs/workers**

CareerOneStop — After a Layoff — **careeronestop.org/HowTo/AfterALayoff**

LinkedIn — Laid off, what's next: five immediate actions — **linkedin.com/business/learning/blog**

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