



## **MANAGING RETRENCHMENT**

*If the axe must fall, here's how you can help your employees deal with the internal and external struggles of losing one's rice bowl.*

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Retrenchment, down-sizing, right-sizing. Call it what you like, letting go of staff is not pleasant but it may be a necessary evil to keep your company afloat in these difficult times. However, as a compassionate employer concerned with the welfare of the employees you need to let go, you can handle such business realignment exercises with flair by sending your retrenched staff for a Career In Transition (CIT) workshop, which our company has recently launched.

Conducted in a combination of group and one-on-one coaching sessions, such workshops are a more economical alternative to the full suite of Outplacement services offered by some companies. They help manage the transition for the employee so that they can “move on” peacefully, minimising any feelings of resentment, bitterness or depression.

This begins with Change Management. Change is daunting for most people and being retrenched can be a big blow to some, especially for those of higher levels in the corporate chain and workers who equate their self-worth or sense of identity with what they do – their jobs. To help the employee cope with the change of getting retrenched, the objective is to help him/her regain confidence by restructuring his/her mindset – away from the stigma of feeling ashamed and instead, looking to the future in anticipation of what opportunities may lie ahead.

This ‘healing’ process begins with the employee first acknowledging his/her emotions, concerns and fears. Often, the person is in denial about how he feels about the situation, choosing to spring into action to find another job before taking time out to self-reflect. The danger of this is that if they have still not found a job

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months down the road, reality hits and they might sink into depression. To counter this, employees are pre-empted about the 5 Stages of Grief popularised by author Elisabeth Kübler-Ross: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression and finally, Acceptance during the workshop.

The next important step is Personality Profiling. Personality tests are employed in order to determine if the employee is even in the 'right' career that is suited to his personality. Generally, people are hard wired a certain way, which makes them better suited to a particular type of job. For instance, a person who does not have an affinity for numbers finds himself in accounting because of the educational path he happened to fall into. At heart, perhaps he is a real 'people person' and has a desire to go out and meet people and close sales. As a result, the participant may even consider switching careers altogether. Again, change can be scary but at the end of the day, the person may discover greater fulfilment and job satisfaction in his new career.

These days, a lot of companies are moving towards behavioural based interviewing techniques, as opposed to the more common Unstructured/Traditional Interviews, which are generic questions such as a person's reasons for leaving the previous company, their strengths and weaknesses, and what their greatest achievements are.

In contrast, Competency/Behavioural Based Interviews are based on the premise that past behaviour is the best predictor of future behaviour. Interviewers seek to obtain information about candidates' past behaviour given certain situations. Such interviews are structured, with questions that relate directly to the essential criteria and competencies required for the post. Research into recruitment and selection methodology suggests that structured, competency based interviews can be one of the most reliable and accurate forms of assessment.

In the workshop, the participant is given hypothetical scenarios so they won't be caught off guard during an interview, and asked what action they would take in such a situation. Then based on this action, what result was achieved, and what learning points were gleaned? Some of the common situation-based questions include those related to conflict management (*How would you handle a 'difficult' boss?*), adaptability (*Tell us about the biggest change you had to deal with, and how you coped with it.*), communication skills (*Tell us about a situation in which*

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*communication skills made a difference to the situation.*), leadership capabilities, delegation skills, creativity, etc.

Beyond what's outlined above, the CIT workshop also entails resume writing tips, salary negotiation techniques, the use of role play for more effective learning, and even includes familiarisation with job search portals and recruitment firms that the employee can use as a resource in securing a new job.

On the surface, it may seem like such an investment in providing CIT services to retrenched employees may end up benefiting your company's competitors. However, at the end of the day, think long-term and look at the big picture context – such a 'compassionate' initiative will only serve to augment your company's brand equity and position it as an attractive employer to work for, which will in turn make it easier to attract superior talent for when the economic upswing returns. Who knows, the talent you need to retrench now may even be the ones who come back knocking on your doors again when times are better.

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