

Perspectives

Public Management received 20 articles from administrators who responded to an SOS asking ICMA members to share their personal experiences on coping with in-transition. The large response was appreciated. Because all the articles could not be published in the editorial space available, the articles that follow represent viewpoints contained in all the comments. They have been selected with the assistance of Illinois Range Rider Robert Morris, a former manager of Glencoe, Illinois, and a staff member of the ICMA Retirement Corporation before his retirement in 1991.

Mr. Morris also helped compile checklists of coping tips that draw on common themes in all members' submissions. Two lists of tips follow these articles; one list is to help members in transition and the other list is to help members reach out to colleagues in transition.

Personal Experiences On Coping With In-transition

Survival Tips for Members in Transition

After nearly eight years as an assistant city manager, I was elated when I was offered my first city manager position. After 15 years of progressive municipal government experience, I felt I was immensely qualified to become a city manager and was tremendously excited about the prospect of becoming one of the elite of the career I had chosen. What 15 years of experience did not prepare me for was the shock, disappointment, and deflation that followed losing my position after less than six months on the job.

*Daniel Joseph
Assistant City Manager
Mission Viejo, California*

Probably the first emotion I experienced was disbelief. How could something like this happen to me? I told myself, "I am a good person, a good manager, this can not really be happening." After realizing that it was happening to me, I sat down to develop a plan for reentering the workforce.

The first thing I told myself was to be realistic. I knew it would probably take time before a suitable position opened up, so I needed to make some short-term goals. One of those goals, and perhaps the most important piece of advice I can impart, was not to take the first job to come along. Unquestionably, a certain amount of anxiety accompanies unemployment, but if you have just come from a bad experience, the last thing you want is another one. Be critical and make sure your next position is a good fit.

Another goal I made was to have some fun while I had the time. I knew that even in the best scenario I would probably be unemployed for a couple of months. So, finances permitting, I decided to take some time for myself. One usually needs a refresher after "hitting the beach."

I think it is very important to keep busy when you are not working. One way is to do some real work while looking for permanent employment. Now is the time to call in those debts that have been owed to you over the years. Call some of your city manager friends and let them know you would not mind working on some of those special projects that have been lying around. Not only will this bring in a little money to tide you over, it will keep your mind sharp and your face familiar.

When "in transition" you find yourself with time you never realized you had. This is an opportunity to do those little things around the house that you have put off. When I "hit the beach," I made a list of a dozen projects I wanted to complete. They ranged from painting the house, to

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waxing the car, to getting myself in good physical shape. Take this opportunity to get things done. Again, keeping busy will help immensely your psychological well being.

I might add that after losing my job, I received not only supportive calls from my close friends, but also from my colleagues. These were very much appreciated. I was very moved to receive calls from colleagues I did not know very well, or, in some cases not at all. I even received a letter from an out-of-state manager I had never met.

The emotional strain on yourself and your family can be very tough. The best way to handle it, in my opinion, is to avoid blaming yourself for whatever went wrong and to concentrate on how the next position will be better. I can not emphasize enough the importance of using your time productively and doing something special for yourself. While your stay "on the beach" might be longer than you like (mine lasted 14 months), take heed that when you land on your feet again you will probably be stronger than ever. I am enjoying the profession now more than ever.

Lessons Learned

*John Koelsch
City Manager
Presque Isle, Maine*

In my career as a city manager I have been in transition several times. Fortunately, all but one of those periods lasted only a few weeks. The one period that was longer than a few weeks happened early in my career and lasted for 10 months. During that time I paid for and took professional job-hunting training, applied for more than 700 positions, traveled more than 27,000 miles pursuing jobs, and learned some valuable professional and personal lessons.

Professional Lessons

The first and best professional advice I received is, "When you are unemployed YOUR JOB IS TO FIND A JOB!" This means treating your job search the same way, with the same commitment, as you would a paid professional position.

First, get organized. Update and review your resume. For easy access, assemble, organize, and file your background materials from references to dates and addresses for previous positions. This will save you wear, tear, and aggravation. Stay disciplined and work at the job of finding a job with regular set hours and a regular routine.

Second, establish the parameters of your search by determining acceptable positions, salaries, locations, etc., and then pursue all possibilities within those parameters. Do not eliminate a job possibility by making assumptions about people, places, and positions. Remember, you can always say no to a job offer, so check it out and remain open to possibilities.

Third, stick to it. As a former assistant of mine, who is now a manager, was fond of saying, "I was looking for a job when I found this one." If you

continue to work at it the job will come. So, do not panic and decide foolishly because of the pressure to get a job—any job. Neither become a hermit and isolate yourself from all that has hurt you and all that might help you. Both paths are unlikely to be productive. Work at your job search and at retaining your personal stability by remembering you will succeed in the end and the in-transition period is a life experience from which you can learn much about yourself.

Personal Lessons

About halfway through my longest in-transition period, I was visiting my brother Steve in California, and using his home as a base for my search. I was at my lowest point. My depression was both severe and obvious, when my brother gave me the absolute best personal advice I have ever received regarding the time of transition. He told me, "Don't confuse the man with the situation."

As we discussed the matter, he reminded me that I had worth as a human being and value as a professional. He noted those things were true whether or not a given organization chose to recognize and endorse them by offering a job. Keeping these thoughts in mind not only allowed me to retain equanimity personally, it also proved a consistent confidence booster during interviews.

Finally, one of the most important personal lessons I learned was the stress of being in transition does not end with starting a new job. Most of us tend to bottle up our anger and grieve over what has been done to us because we simply do not have the time or energy to deal with it while we conduct a job search. Then when we get a new job, the relief and joy at being through the transition period precludes dealing with the loss, and we usually think it is over and done with.

Not true. Involuntary separation from a position, no matter what the circumstances, constitutes a real loss. As with any loss, we must go through a full grieving process if we are to accomplish a full recovery. We have to face up to and deal with the following emotions, although the timing, order, and intensity may vary.

Anger. This emotion will be paramount and righteous. It is okay to be angry at what has been done to us and at who did it. It is not okay to pursue it with foolish actions intended for revenge; nor is it productive to retain the anger and have it absorb out time and energy. Rather, face it, acknowledge it, and be done with it.

Shame. The questions of "What did I do wrong?" and "What could I have done differently?" are haunting ones, and they often have no real answer. The fact is, given that we are human, we are rarely either perfectly blameless or totally at fault. Again, face the emotion, acknowledge it, and be done with it. It is probably better to be human than to be perfect anyway, and you are stuck with being human.

Sorrow. Sadness over loss, over that which has been taken and can not be restored, is the most human of emotions. It can also be the most cleansing and healing of emotions if we do not wallow in it. In your sorrow, acknowledge lessons learned, treasure moments and friends gained, and recognize that life is a journey, not a destination. The path needs some lows so we may truly appreciate the highs.

Acceptance. Accepting what has been done is the final step in transition to full recovery. You can not change what has happened. Accept it and go forward. When you have accomplished this your transition will be complete.

Life Goes On

*James Hendrickson
City Manager
Palos Verdes Estates,
California*

When each of us makes the determination to become a manager, we are aware that our security is suddenly much more precarious. We know the statistics—the average tenure of a city manager is three to five years. And we joke about the fact that you have not made it in the profession until you have been fired. We know all of this, however, at an intellectual, rather than a feeling level.

I submit that the actual experience of being fired is totally different than our supposition of what it would be like. It is a searing and unforgettable event that rocks the foundations of one's belief about one's capabilities and self-worth. But life goes on. If viewed in a healthy fashion, it offers the opportunity to critically examine your life, perhaps even your values, before determining where you will head in the future.

Mine afforded me a three-and-a-half month vacation, which was the most time I had had off in nearly 20 years. Perhaps some of the things I discovered during my transition will assist those of you who might be in the same position, now or in the future.

Let It Be. The old Beatles' song provided me a good deal of solace. To a great extent, you must let the river flow. It is not unlike the situation of a recovering alcoholic—you must take it one day at a time. Opportunities will present themselves, interesting and unexpected things will happen to you, and decisions about your future will become clear if you do not force them. Alan Watts once wrote

"The question 'what shall we do about it?' is only asked by those who do not understand the

problem. If a problem can be solved at all, to understand it and to know what to do about it are the same thing. On the other hand, doing something about a problem which you do not understand is like trying to clear away darkness by thrusting it aside with your hands. When light is brought, the darkness vanishes at once."

Cultivate Your Personal Relationships. I was fortunate in that I continued to serve another five and a half months in the organization as city manager before I separated-out. One of my prime focuses was to serve as a ballast for the rest—especially the department heads who were apprehensive about the future. It fortified my spirits to support them and ensure we responded in a professional manner to the issues before us. I experienced a greater sense of freedom to attempt things, from which I had once shied away. My fellow city managers and my family were the greatest source of strength to me when my spirits ebbed. Their confidence, reaching out, and good humor sustained me through many hard times. To find that one is loved and cared for simply as a human being, and not because of the position he holds, is one of the most empowering things I have ever experienced.

Keep Busy. You need some time to think and sort things out, but too much free time can be debilitating. It can lead to recriminations about what happened, endlessly reworking the events that led to your demise, blaming yourself and others, all of which is self-destructive. I made sure I maintained a busy schedule and kept in constant contact with others. I set regular luncheon dates, telephoned many friends and colleagues, secured temporary consulting jobs, and played tennis regularly. The vigorous, physical exercise was a wonderful antidote to the stress and

anxiety that would build. And an unintended consequence was that I raised the level of my game a notch or two, the most productive thing I accomplished during my three-and-one-half-month hiatus!

Read A Lot. I had not set aside much time to read books in the years since I graduated from college. Suddenly, I had a magnificent opportunity to make up for lost time. I read voraciously—six or seven books and scores of magazine articles. They provided perspective, guidance, and inspiration. I was most especially drawn to the biographies of historic figures who had suffered tremendous tragedy and adversity in their lives, but managed to surmount them, such as Winston Churchill and Abraham Lincoln.

In his late years, Winston Churchill gave a speech at Harrow, the English Prep School he attended as a boy. The headmaster told the boys, "This is an historic moment. Winston Churchill is the greatest speaker of the English language. Write down everything he says. He will make an unforgettable speech!"

When Churchill walked out to give his speech, he peered over the top of his glasses and said, "Never give up. Never, never, never, never give up." Those words continued to echo through my mind whenever I face an apparently insurmountable task.

Everyone must find his or her own way. What works for one might not work for another. But one thing I discovered is that we have far less control over our lives than we presume. We are far less important to our organizations than we presume. And the vast majority of us would be more sensitive and capable managers if we were forced to eat more humble pie, on occasion. Stewart Emery has said

"I have a sense of what the purpose of my life is and here it is: to respond in a workable fashion

to whatever happens to be in front of me at the moment—recognizing that I may not have much choice about what is in front of me.... What's in front of us are the lessons we each have to learn."

Keep On Track

*Frank Connolly
Town Manager
North Branford,
Connecticut*

My period of "in transition" began October 1, 1990, following a stay of almost 10 years in one town as both assistant town manager and town manager. Preparing for the upcoming "down" period, I made a number of resolutions to maintain a consistency in my schedule, since I was facing the longest period of unemployment since before I was 16, more than 30 years ago.

The items on my resolution list included the following:

1. Maintain a schedule of rising by 8:00 a.m., working on letters and making telephone calls, and reading. Coffee at 10:00 a.m. Monday through Friday, with a break in this routine for the weekends.
2. Jog three miles each day during the week.
3. Maintain regular contact with the local Chamber of Commerce, with which I had been active.
4. Keep active in the state association for managers.
5. Maintain a log of all the jobs applied for, along with a status report of each one.
6. Use the services that the town had offered me of an outplacement firm.
7. Finish a book on local government that I had started writing.
8. Prepare and carry out a detailed list of all the projects around the house that had to be completed.

9. Spend some time with my parents, which I had been unable to do since childhood.

In the beginning I received calls and letters from many managers, both in and out of state. Several managers who had been through transition called and offered moral support. As time wore on, however, only the managers and assistant managers in the immediate areas maintained the telephone calls and the lunches. Calls from my former staff also helped. I attended chamber meetings of the board of directors, as well as spoke with several businessmen. Unfortunately, Connecticut's economy state was extremely poor, with both the private and public sectors in bad financial condition.

My family, especially my wife, provided strong support. Continuous conversations were held on various job options, career changes, relocation, impact on the children, and a host of other items. Former mayors, former councilmembers, neighbors, and clergy maintained a keen interest in my status. A close friend who was familiar with the many issues in job seeking via his work in the business community, provided tips on both the psychological roller coaster I would be facing, as well as techniques of job seeking.

Two mechanical items proved essential. The word processing on my computer allowed me to write my book and send out numerous letters. A telephone answering machine had to be purchased; this greatly alleviated the pressure of feeling I had to "stay home by the phone," especially after an interview (job offers come by telephone, rejections come in the mail).

This is a difficult period, and it changes your attitude on work itself. One looks forward more to work, and the joy of having a place to go to on a regular schedule. Weekends again take on the meaning they are supposed to have.

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An important element soon becomes quite apparent—the fun of weekends would no longer be fun if they were allowed to blur with the rest of the week. I soon realized what the dangers of retirement would be if each day was the same. I filled the workweek with my writing, letters, luncheon meetings, telephone calls, and I had cocktails only on weekends.

Over time, I noticed the subtleties of no longer being a manager and being gainfully employed. Telephone calls took longer to be returned, or were not returned at all. A job application with a quasi-governmental statewide agency for an advertised opening dragged on for months without the courtesy of a telephone call or letter for updating. The rejection for the position was by mail, despite the fact I had worked professionally with the agency in my

capacity as town manager. For another position that I was interviewed for, I found out the results in the newspaper; a form letter was received three weeks later!

Other unanticipated events affected me in this transition. Trips to the grocery store in the middle of the week raised guilt feelings, as I bumped into many women and retirees doing their shopping. Lowered interest rates on mortgages could not be applied for, since employment could not be listed. I became suddenly sensitive to being asked for a work telephone number when cashing a check (was this a new question or had I never noticed?).

One extremely helpful item was obtaining a part-time teaching position at a local university. This not only occupied large blocks of time, but again demonstrated the joy of teaching at the graduate level.

My Advice to You...

Having recently experienced a five-month transitional period between jobs, I welcome the opportunity to share with other management colleagues the knowledge I gained during this period. The advice that I will give below has been obtained from many individuals within and outside the management profession.

*Paul Wenbert
City Administrator
Newton, Iowa*

1. Attempt to obtain a high degree of economic security prior to a transitional period. Those of us in the management profession realize the volatile nature of our jobs and the need for severance protection. Two good publications regarding employment agreements and severance provisions are: *Employment Agreements for Managers—Guidelines for Local Government Managers* published by ICMA and *A Study of the Provisions of City*

Manager Employment Agreements published by the California City Management Foundation. Having a high level of economic security is important because I found that a comprehensive employment search campaign requires at least a 40-hour per week effort. Also, it should be noted that there seems to be a common misunderstanding regarding eligibility for unemployment compensation. Even though an individual is collecting severance payments under federal law, he or she is still entitled to receive unemployment compensation that can provide an additional measure of economic security.

2. Maintain a positive attitude! I believe that maintaining a positive attitude is by far the most important aspect that will lead to a successful conclusion of your transitional period. I took the attitude that this would (I hoped!) be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to devote myself to a full-time job search campaign, both within and outside the management profession. By viewing this transitional period as an opportunity, as opposed to an obstacle, I was able to maintain a positive attitude, which enhanced my productivity.

3. Define your job search objectives and develop a plan for achieving those objectives. If you recently have left a city or county manager position, it might be useful to consider broadening your horizons by applying for assistant manager and department head positions. I became aware of many excellent generalist management opportunities in department head and assistant manager roles that previously I might not have considered. Also, if you have the economic security to spend the time to consider career options outside of the local government management field, the transitional period is a good time to do so. Because I had never previously considered any positions outside of the management

field, I found that pursuing these positions took a great deal more time. Even though I ultimately accepted a position in the city management field, I would estimate that I spent approximately 75 percent of my time exploring private sector opportunities. I found that the strategies used in searching for private sector jobs were very different from those in the city management field. Sources that I found valuable in conducting a private sector job search campaign were using an outplacement firm, career counseling advice from a public/private sector recruiter whom I had met in a previous city management search, and reading various career search books, the best of which is, *What Color Is Your Parachute?* by Richard N. Bolles.

4. Develop and use an effective network of people who can assist you in your job search campaign. I found networking very valuable, especially for private sector positions, as estimates are that 75 to 85 percent of all private sector jobs are not advertised. Thus, networking can help you develop sources that can locate private sector career opportunities. Your network should include the private sector contacts you have made throughout your career, former management professionals who are now in private sector management positions, and management colleagues who can help you expand your private sector networking sources through their contacts.

5. Obtain several publications that advertise local government management positions. While the *ICMA Newsletter* is by far the best source for local government management job announcements, many other publications are available that advertise local government management positions that do not appear in the *ICMA Newsletter*. Rather than ordering all these publications, you might wish to contact local government manage-

ment colleagues and ask them to send you copies of any such publications to which they subscribe.

6. Develop a good personal support network. The support of your immediate family, relatives, former work colleagues, and fiends can provide you with a good deal of positive reinforcement, encouragement, and employment leads that can help you to sustain a positive attitude during the transitional period. One of the best decisions I made at the onset of my transitional period was to stay active in my regional city management association and the local Rotary club, as these individuals were a tremendous source of personal support and employment networking. While there is a temptation immediately after separation from a job to "drop out," I would encourage you to remain active in as many associations and organizations as possible, as you will find this very rewarding.

Finally, as I know I found it very helpful to talk with other management colleagues during my transitional period to receive their ideas, support, and encouragement, I would be happy to do the same for other management professionals in transition.

"They've Done You a Favor"

*Robert Christofferson
City Manager
Redding, California*

Five years ago I had the good fortune of being fired by the Fresno, California, city council (having served the three years traditionally allotted city managers in that city), and I have a few ideas to offer in response to the invitation to present survival tips.

First, collegial support is not only important, but essential. Prior to my

own firing, I had been passively reluctant to call colleagues who had been fired, thinking they had much more important things on their minds and my call would simply be an intrusion. I was wrong. In my own situation, I really appreciated the quick and continuing barrage of calls from friends (including transitional job offers), and I resolved I would provide such support for my colleagues in the future.

Second, it is important to maintain a sense of balance. I knew I had acted correctly and professionally, and a curious sense of euphoria and pride substituted for the more negative emotions that one might normally expect. Like so many city managers before me, I found there was life after Fresno.

Third, a sense of humor is equally important so that you can see the humor in situations, such as the reason why you are terminated ("you are too professional") and why you are rejected from interviewing for some jobs ("you are over-qualified"). One can even see humor, if not irony, when voters return the favor to the councilmen who fired you.

Fourth, the job search can be an invigorating adventure, with so many options and alternatives available. My wife and I actually had fun checking out virtually every lead that headhunters and job advertisements presented. As it turned out, I took the job that was suggested the day after I was fired, but the process took four months. The only downside we experienced during the search was that we did not know how the story ended, and that creates uneasiness.

Finally, I would encourage colleagues who are fired to view the situation in a positive light as a new opportunity. The range of options is broadened and the opportunities are mind-boggling. Many, if not most, managers who are forced to find a new job do so at a financial advantage, in addition to the shedding of what is probably an intrinsically bad

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own departure.

situation. Get the old experience behind you, and attack the future with vigor and enthusiasm. As my wife said when I initially gave her the news of my firing, "They've done you a favor."

Transition Survival Tips

*Martha Cline
Bethesda, Maryland*

Some transitions are smoother than others. Like this one, for instance. The final vote is not in yet, but it has all the hallmarks of one of the smoothest.

Take today, for instance. Here I am, minus three days and counting. This Friday, June 28, is my last day as manager of the town of Chevy Chase, Maryland. I stayed late at work to write a "Memo to the Council and New Town Manager. Subject: More Helpful Hints to Facilitate a Smooth Transition." Then, I get home to read my *ICMA Newsletter* and what do I see on the first page? An invitation to sub-

mit an article to *Public Management* magazine on survival tips to local government managers in transition.

Now, I ask you, what could be more perfect? So, here I go. Short and sweet. Everything I have learned (so far!) about career transitions.

Survival tip #1. Always be silently vigilant for signs of possible deterioration of the support mechanisms necessary for you to continue performing well. In my case, after more than five years' successful tenure at Chevy Chase, I recognized, during budget season last February and March, some old, potentially devastating issues resurfacing—largely under the guise of fiscal constraint..

Survival tip #2. Know when it is time to go. Then, go. I tested my silent observations and concerns, over time, being careful not to project my concerns onto others. After conferring with a trusted confidant, and talking "off the record" with a councilmember, my concerns were validated. Deciding it was highly unlikely that a mutually satisfactory resolution could be arrived at, I had to ask myself the scariest question of all: Is it possible for me to leave?

Survival tip #3. Empower yourself to design and create the terms, conditions, and environment of your departure. For me that meant announcing to the council my intention to leave in three months. It also meant telling them how committed I was to a mutually respectful, friendly parting. It worked. Together, we created a public impression of mutual regard, and, more importantly, a commitment to continuing the excellent levels of service constituents have a right to expect from their public officials—despite their personal differences. For many managers it means creating the needed time—while still employed—to network and begin the search for a new position.

Survival tip #4. (This one is real difficult.) Once the decision has been made, let go. Detach. Do not let this advice fool you. Just because I

give it does not mean I have been totally successful. Generally, however, it means avoiding doing or saying anything that will sabotage your good intentions. I have found that such actions or words are almost always attached to my ego (you know, the "E" word).

Survival tip #5. After departure, avoid the "Louis IX Syndrome," which goes something like "Apres moi, le deluge!" (After me, the deluge!). Wish them all well, councilmembers, residents, and your successor. Especially your loyal staff. Because they are probably the ones most likely to suffer during the transition.

Postscript: The above scenario would not have been possible without the support of my husband and the "advanced" ages of my children, all of whom are (finally!) out of college.

From Ex-manager To Manager in Transition

*Carol O'Dowd
Denver, Colorado*

The crisp mountain air on an autumn Saturday morning made the small dude ranch a perfect setting for a council retreat. The new council had been in office only three and a half months and had not given me directions on their priorities. The mayor and I had developed the agenda together (or so I thought). The facilitator was pleased at my agreeing to help the council change the form of government, if that was their decision. My desire was for council, manager, staff, and citizens to be using the same gameplan.

Unfortunately, the mayor did not share the real gameplan for the retreat with me. The morning session on the role of the manager deteriorated.

During a break, the council went to the lake for 30 minutes. As they returned, the mayor walked up to me and said, "Obviously, it is not working. So, we want you to leave. The sooner the better." I reminded him of the prepaid ICMA conference, whereupon he advised me to attend the conference, but not to return to the office.

With nothing left to say, I got into my car to drive home. I felt as if I had been physically hit by the words, and my mind reeled from the blow. How could I go to the conference? Stand up as moderator of my session and say, "Hi! I have just been fired." Fortunately, my husband encouraged me to go.

Staring out the airplane window, I watched the gold and green mountains fall away from me. My loss seemed so great because my job was such a large part of my identity.

My thoughts generated only questions. How do I introduce myself to my former colleagues? How do I explain being fired for doing my job? Will my peers believe that a council neither wants a professional manager nor wants to eliminate the position? Did I manage poorly?

In my mind the events made me appear obsolete. I was left with feelings of failure, shame, anger, and hurt. Fortunately, attending the ICMA conference nurtured a spark of spirit still in me. The lesson awaiting me was not to think of myself as an ex-city manager. I was welcomed and respected with all my pain. Not having to pretend and still be understood felt good. Listening to the stories of others who had experienced similar situations was reassuring. Maybe I was sane after all. Although I had arrived alone, during my stay I never ate alone. The hugs and caring expressed by so many people I highly respect began the healing process before I recognized it.

The sincerely expressed concern for my well being was more important than publications or special ser-

vices. The most help came from the consistent insistence by others recognizing me as a manager, a manager in transition. Only now can I share how valuable that was. I began to believe it.

Accepting myself as a manager in transition was an important first step in leaving the ex-manager phase. Although still feeling some pain, I know it will pass. The manager in-transition period is time for reevaluating life priorities. It is a time to count your blessings. Some good advice I received was to take the time to heal and reenter the workforce. For each of us, the amount of time needed for healing and shifting into transition will be different.

Transition to or from anything requires time for letting go of the old, exploring and welcoming in the new. It takes time to change such habits as spending 12-hour days working on major city issues to no hours a day. After the shock, comes a time for introspection and reflection. For some, the distance of time might be needed to leave behind hurt carried from a place. For others a change of pace to a job other than manager or government might be needed. Some managers reorient through contract work or consulting. Yet, some can adjust while applying for their next manager job. Regardless of style, the critical matter is taking time, however long or short, to heal the spirit and prepare for the next job or lifestyle change.

In addition to evaluating personal and professional priorities, we all must lean on our friends. Managers are some of the best friends out there to assist you with a change. Although I can not share the ending to this manager in transition story at the time this is written, my fellow colleagues helped greatly in my shift from ex-manager to manager in transition. ICMA staff and ICMA members took time to advise me of the support services available. Many managers knowingly and unknow-

ingly helped me to this stage. So did my husband and my friends. They made it possible for me to look forward to this time of transition as a period of positive growth. It will have a happy ending, or is that a happy beginning?

My focus now is on new beginnings. For those in an ex-city manager stage or the in-transition stage, allow me to pass on two comments. From Mike Smith, city manager, Wheat Ridge, Colorado: "You have just left a toxic organization. It had nothing to do with your management skills, talents, or abilities. Unfortunately, it had to do with a basic human reaction to change—fear." And, from David McLaughlin, president, The Aspen Institute: "Change agents never have an easy road and when those who have the power to block change, dig in their heels, it is not a very fulfilling experience."

Out on the Street

S David Weitzel
Executive Administrator
Kansas City, Kansas

Survivors of spectacular collisions report that events seem to be in slow motion although in real time they are remarkably fast. My unplanned separation was such an event. My spouse and I spent time dealing with the rejection, the anger, the embarrassment, the hopelessness, and the basic unfairness of doing a great job (even the new mayor said so) and still be out on the street. Ironically, the day after, on television, I watched Charlie Chaplin in "The Little Bum" tossed out on his keester a dozen times.

As you clear out your desk, it is evident that self-respect does not come easily with any of the events of recent weeks. While your old employees, friends, service club members, church members, kids' playmates, and teachers regard you in a new

Treat your new job

search as a topic

that is to be

researched

thoroughly and

embraced

wholeheartedly.

light, you must struggle with this new light. "Lame ducks" and "dead ducks" are all embarrassments for participants in this unique human experience in government. For our family, it was a growing experience having been both kinds of "ducks". To survive the inevitable transition, confront the temporary nature of your job. Many of us choose to ignore it, but sooner or later we will move on to voluntary or involuntary retirement.

I have learned to maintain my relationship with my spiritual source of strength. Do not wait until you are in trouble to relate to your creator or spiritual guide. In encountering significant life changes, accept that this is another element in our personal growth.

Maintain a strong relationship with your family before you have trouble. Your spouse has many frustrations regarding your separation as well. Share your frustrations together. Resolve bitterness with humor and love. Support and assure each other that with a partnership

you can survive this journey. Share the truth of these coming changes with your children. They deserve to know exactly what happened. Do not burden them with your bitterness, but share your pride with them.

Share your pride with the community as well. You, your staff, and the past administration have done a darn good job. Carry this spirit into the many interviews you seek. Do not give up your work with service clubs and community groups, but help them prepare for the transition. Your work is not done if you leave them bitter.

You are a professional and you are a valuable resource. Keep in mind that others will seek you if you make yourself available. The same qualities that made you a "problem" to the new administration are the same qualities that someone is looking for.

Keep your regular discipline and your new office either at home or perhaps somewhere else in the community. Get an answering machine so you can return your calls without having to sit by the telephone. Seek a part-time job. My part-time job allowed me exposure to a different type of computer and an educational field (computerized testing). If you have not become familiar with personal computers (PCs) and resume programs, then invest some of your severance pay and get a good PC, a good word processing program, and a good printer.

Continue to be visible in the community, although not at council meetings. Treat the new regime with the same respect that you accord others. In time, they may understand you better. Burned bridges are visible for a long time.

While a few of your professional colleagues will call you initially, most will avoid you as if you were a leper. When you are positioned in the next job, remember how you were treated and seek out and help those you see in transition. You no doubt have a few friends in the profession. Talk to

them frankly about your feelings. They will understand.

Treat your new job search as a topic that is to be thoroughly researched and embraced wholeheartedly. It must be a full-time activity. Send out lots of resumes. Constantly refine your resume so that it really is appropriate to what is requested.

Decide economics as a family, and above all do not overdo the austerity bit unless it is really bad. Use this trek across the desert to be with the kids and wife, who no doubt suffered from your absence during your employment. Try some domestic chores.

Spend some time in low-cost recreation: hiking, biking, softball with the kids. Read your professional journals and a few management books that you have always wanted to read. If you get responses to your resumes, devote some real energy to learning about those communities. Even if you do not get the job you have had an opportunity to practice a consulting role and you have learned from it.

Above all, do not get down on yourself. Realize that what has happened to you is a fact of life for all management public and private sector professionals in this end of the 20th century. My final recommendation is to begin today to improve your personal relationships. I did not survive by myself, but with the love of family, church, neighbors, and friends.

The Shock of Being Unemployed

*Lauren Wasserman
Director of Planning
and Land Use
San Diego County,
California*

Prior to December 1989, local government managers who were

We used this

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fired were, in my view, either incompetent or insensitive to the political winds of change. Obviously, I learned firsthand that in the public arena termination is often unrelated to either ability or past performance.

The most difficult part of being in transition was the sudden realization and sadness that somehow an 11-year working relationship had suddenly ended. With no warning. I was a former city manager.

During the initial shock of unemployment, and for a long time afterward, I was overwhelmed by anger because three newly elected public officials had suddenly interrupted an exciting professional career. I would like to say that all of the anger is gone. But that is not true. I would like to offer advice on how to deal with anger. But I have not dealt with

it well myself. I can only say that anger is baggage that can make one physically ill, so letting go of it is best. I wish it could all be stuffed inside a football and hurled back to my previous city.

One's self-esteem plunges to new depths while in-transition. Friends and particularly colleagues who had experienced similar situations helped me to understand that termination is irreversible, so it is best to spend time looking to the future and exploring new professional opportunities. The support of professional colleagues—including some I had never met—was especially therapeutic to me and my family. Even my former staff provided good cheer by surprising me with a birthday celebration. We received hundreds of calls from friends and managers, some offering consulting work and others offering advice or support. All were appreciated, but one letter in particular was very moving.

I received a letter from a midwestern city manager whom I had never met. He indicated that although he had never been in transition, he imagined it to be a time when support from colleagues was most important. He was right. And his letter helped me to realize that a job loss was only a temporary inconvenience.

Family became even more important during this period. My wife was, as usual, highly supportive. And my children, who were always reluctant to leave the city in which we lived, were now talking enthusiastically about moving to a new community.

The transition time also provided an opportunity to improve my computer skills, something I did not have time for when I was working. Within a short time I was preparing my consultant reports on my Macintosh computer. This new skill was even more necessary as I began to update my resume.

During times of stress, exercise became a part of my daily routine. I spent many hours on daily bicycle

TIPS TO HELP COLLEAGUES IN TRANSITION

- Call or write a colleague who has been terminated and give support and encouragement. This is best done a few days after termination, but continue to show interest by calling or writing regularly. Acknowledge that an "in transition" manager can call you collect.
- Look into your own organization for jobs that your terminated colleague might be interested in (a plus for both of you).
- Invite your colleagues-in-transition to accompany you to professional meetings and help arrange for shared hotel rooms and travel.
- Identify volunteer secretarial resources to help a colleague in transition.
- Write notes to members in transition in your state or those listed in the *ICMA Newsletter*, even if you have never met them.

TIPS TO PREPARE YOURSELF FOR THE POSSIBILITY OF BEING IN TRANSITION

- Plan ahead financially and psychologically for the possibility of sudden termination. Have a good idea of your financial resources so you can assess your options from a long-term perspective. For example, set aside at least six months of living expenses.
- Maintain a list of accomplishments while employed so updating a resume is faster and easier when needed.
- Make sure you have adequate health insurance for you and your family that can be continued if you are terminated.

rides thinking about my career, my family, and my new professional opportunities. I was not sure whether I wanted to be a city manager, whether I wanted to work in the public sector, or whether I wanted to work in private industry.

Even though I received severance pay, the uncertainty of future income led me to consulting work. I discovered that several city managers needed experienced consultants to complete a variety of municipal projects. And I explored the mysteries of county government while working on a long-term assignment for San Bernardino County.

I am fortunate to now have a better job than the one I left. I have learned that there is, indeed, life after management. My new job is just as exciting and challenging as my old one, plus it offers a bonus: more time for my family and more time for recreational activities.

There is Light at the End of the Tunnel

*Laurel Wasserman
Carlsbad, California*

I am a hiker. Often on hikes I have to forge streams and leap from rock to rock to get from one side to the other. Because I have a terrible sense of balance, I treat these occasions with trepidation. My anxiety level elevates as I picture myself slipping off the rocks and falling into the water.

Several times I have slipped on the rocks and I have fallen into the water. It has never been the terrible disaster I imagined. All I do is get wet.

On a marriage encounter weekend in 1975, my husband confided what would be the worst thing that could possibly happen to him in his life: he, the main wage earner in our

family, could some day be fired. In 1989 he was fired. It was not the terrible disaster he had imagined. All he did was find a better job.

Of course we had, for a time great stress. I had to deal with pain. I was hurt that others could cause so much distress for my husband. My pain was like a mourning, which decreased as things got better with us. My husband had to deal with anger. We all know that anger is a self-destructive response. It can cause a variety of physical responses like high blood pressure, muscle tension, and ulcers. Unfortunately, it is not easy to forgive one's enemies in order to get on with life.

We were able to get on with our lives, though. And I can recommend the three most valuable things that we did to cope. First, we saw our friends often and appreciated every supportive note and telephone call. Second, we looked not at the past but at the future. Third, and most valuable, we sat down and made a list of all the good things that came out of the crisis.

When we started this list one evening, we expected that there were a few benefits from the experience. We filled up three pages, a list of 90 items. Some of the items on our list were these: we had the opportunity to relocate (something we had been wanting to do for years); we had the opportunity to change jobs (another thing we had been wanting to do); we had severance pay; we had the precious gift of some free time; and our children became more independent and our family closer. Finally, we used this opportunity to clarify our goals, discovering in the process that we had the emotional strength and confidence to handle this event.

In retrospect, two and half years later, I am grateful that my husband, still a competent, respected professional, is no longer as intensely consumed by his job. He has a better attitude and he is a healthier person. **DAI**