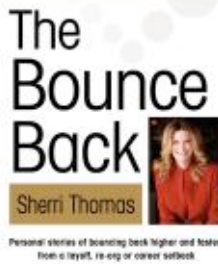


The Bounce Back

Sherri Thomas



**Personal stories of bouncing back higher and faster
from a layoff, re-org or career setback**



In today's tough job market, this book is an insider's guide to building a fresh new start in your career. Whether you've suffered the devastation of being laid off, the frustration of working for a bad manager, or the exasperation of being stuck in a job where you're undervalued and unappreciated, this book provides inspirational stories from the author and 13 other professionals who have successfully taken back control, and bounced back in their career.

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SECTION 1

*Yes, There is Life
after a Lay-off!*

CHAPTER 1

Surviving the 3-bang Lay-offs!



Insecurities. We've all experienced career setbacks, but it's not the setback itself that keeps us from moving forward in our career. It's how you *internalize* the setback that can stop you from moving forward.

Whether the setback was a result of company cutbacks, unmet goals, misaligned expectations, personality clashes or circumstances beyond your control there are always lingering feelings of shock, devastation, anger, frustration, rejection, embarrassment, anxiety and a loss of self-identity. *If I have no job, then who am I?*

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THE SITUATION

Earlier in my career, I was laid off three times in a row within an 8-month period. Bang. Bang. Bang.

The first time was with a TV station where I had worked for 3 ½ years as Community Relations Manager. It had been my favorite job of all time and I was good at it. We were the #1 TV station in the market and I had increased our annual community sponsorships by 250%. I loved my job, my manager and my responsibilities. Then, Rupert Murdoch purchased the TV station and after some restructuring, I was out. Bang.

I quickly got my next gig at an Advertising Agency in Phoenix where I was hired as the Senior Account Manager. The agency had just lost two key people - one was a founding partner responsible for public relations and the other was the Sr. Account Manager responsible for managing 13 clients. The expectation was that I could fill both of their shoes. I couldn't. I floundered. I flailed. I failed. After four excruciatingly long months, I was asked to leave. Bang. Bang.

Within 30 days, I landed back on my feet as the new marketing manager at a large Accounting firm. I was hired to replace "Stacy", who apparently was the smartest, most gifted and most beloved employee on the planet. I was to replace *her*. The truth was that I'd never worked for accountants, and never even *had* an accountant at that time. It was a new world for me and a very different culture.

Just coming off of two lay-offs, I was extremely insecure and carried a bucket load of self-doubt. I was too scared to ask for help, and too insecure to say what I didn't know. So I hid in my office pouring through training manuals of accounting policies and procedures, and worked 70-hour weeks.

On my 3rd week I got a call from a prospective employer where I had applied the month prior. I basically said something like, *You're too late! Someone else just hired me!* I remember it felt good being in high demand in the job market. I had my confidence back, and I must have been doing pretty well in my new job because on the 4th week my manager gave me a 7-percent raise. Two days later, he laid me off.

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Seriously?? I remember sitting in the conference room across the table from my manager and HR rep asking, *Why?* My manager shrugged and said it just wasn't working out. I asked, *What did I do?* He shrugged again. I asked, *What didn't I do?* He just stared at me in complete silence. Bang. Bang. Bang.

I never found out the reason. Over the next few weeks, I obsessively played re-runs in my mind of conversations I had with my manager and the 10 partners of the accounting firm. Even today it's still a mystery.

The three bang lay-offs rattled me to my core. I was traumatized. I felt like I had three big, gnarly scars right on my face for the whole world to see. Feelings of inferiority, insecurity, and questioning my self worth as an employee. As a *person*. Consuming me were questions like, *Why me? What happened? What did I do wrong? What could I have done differently?*

I spent the next month in a fog. Head spinning. World turned upside down. Utter exhaustion. I hated mornings. Getting up was like putting on a big wet pair of overalls that I was forced to trudge around in. Nothing made sense. There was no logic anymore, just massive confusion and a nasty bad attitude. I didn't know where I belonged, or what I was supposed to be doing. My ego was shattered. My world was sour.

I needed a job, but the fear of potentially being laid off again, the fear of rejection, the fear of failure – all of those fears consumed me.

I eventually landed a great new job at a Fortune 100 Company working directly for a VP as a Regional Marketing Manager, but before I go there I want to share with you how I overcame the desire to curl up in a ball hiding underneath my bed with my cat, Gracie, wallowing in self pity.

After spending four loooong weeks in my bathrobe, I knew I had to start again. I also knew that nobody else would have confidence in me if I didn't have confidence in myself. So I mustered up every ounce of courage I had, went out into the "real world" again, and landed one of my most favorite jobs ever!

The 3-bang lay-offs were the craziest times in my career, but the richness of what I learned gave me a unique set of survival skills

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including resilience, persistence and a determination to step up and drive my own career.

THE STRATEGY

Hold up the mirror. After the third layoff, I knew that it was time to take a long hard look at myself. I knew that things happen for a reason, and that this was happening to me for a reason. These three situations didn't have anything to do with anyone else. They were about me, and it was all getting very, very personal.

My situation was bleak. I was embarrassed, grumpy and broke. I hadn't worked with the last two companies long enough to apply for unemployment benefits so I had zero income. That was scary. I had no money, no self-confidence and no opportunities on the horizon.

So I did what any strong, smart, independent career woman would do. I moved back in with my parents. I added "humbled" to the list of being embarrassed, grumpy and broke.

When you don't have any income, and don't have any opportunities in the near future for income, your world becomes very, very small. You can't afford to do anything. Anything. You stop socializing with friends. You stop going out to lunch. Simple things like going to the movies and zipping through the drive-thru to slurp a Wendy's Frosty become unaffordable luxuries.

After spending four weeks in my bathrobe, eating my famous baked potato and Diet Coke dinner and hiding underneath my bed with my cat Gracie, who became my sole source of entertainment, I knew I had to start again. I also knew that nobody else would have the confidence to hire me if I didn't have confidence in myself.

So I started the painful process of remembering each of the lay-offs, and gleaned any lessons from those experiences so that I could get "*it*" - whatever "*it*" was that I was supposed to get.

I re-examined each lay-off. I held up the mirror and looked at myself through the eyes of my manager, Sr. leaders, customers and peers. I thought about the situations that made me uncomfortable and tried to remember what was happening and what was said. I replayed in

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my mind over and over any conversations and comments that reflected on my job or performance.

I was able to gain some perspective and a little clarity on what I could have done better in those last 3 jobs. It wasn't to put blame on myself. As Maya Angelou says, "*You do better when you know better,*" and in those last three jobs I was doing the best I could do. The self reflection simply helped me learn more about myself in each of those situations, so that I could do better in my next position.

I wrote down all of the things I could have done better which included things like...

Things I should have done better -

1. Spend more time building positive relationships with colleagues.
2. Stop burying myself in my cube with reports and training manuals.
3. Don't be afraid to ask for help.
4. Clarify expectations with my manager.
5. Work with my manager to develop an integration plan for the first 3-months including what I'll be learning, working on and delivering.

I learned more about myself and my learning style. For example, I realized that when I started a new job my learning style was to hunker down in my office and bury myself in reports and training manuals. After a few weeks, I would then gain the confidence and knowledge to go meet with managers, employees and customers. *But that's not the best approach when you're a new hire and integrating into a company.*

I started getting a very clear picture on what I should have done better, and how I could set myself up for success in my next job.

Next, I made a list of all the things I thought that my managers could have done better. (This was a much more fun list to make!) I wrote down...

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Things they should have done better -

1. Hey Mr. Knucklehead, stop adding agenda items 4-seconds before my customer meeting, and then laughing at me when I looked like a disorganized buffoon.
2. Let me know when you change the start time of a meeting with one of my key customers.
3. Don't take off skiing and leave me with an RFP report I've never done before that's due tomorrow.

You know, a bunch of stuff like that.

SEEK TO UNDERSTAND

Writing these two lists helped me take the emotion out of the 3-bang lay-offs, and just focus on the facts. They helped me understand that there were things I should have done differently, and helped me see the circumstances which led up to each of the lay-offs. I still may not have completely understood all of the reasons behind each of the lay-offs, but I was starting to feel a sense of understanding and purpose for what I could do differently in my next job to set myself up for success.

LESSONS LEARNED

You are responsible for your own success. Not your manager, customers or anyone else. Just you, and you alone. As a new employee in an organization, you can set yourself up for success by stepping up and taking ownership of your career. In doing so, there are two misconceptions most new employees have -

MYTH #1: ASKING FOR HELP MAKES YOU LOOK INCOMPETENT

At that time in my career, I had the misperception that I shouldn't ask for help because I was the subject matter expert and should know

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everything (or at least be resourceful enough to find the answers.) But that's ridiculous! As you ramp into a new organization, you need guidance to help you integrate and understand the company's culture, goals, business processes and internal political system. You need a manager who helps you ramp into your new role quickly and set you up for success.

The first 3 months of employment is a special grace period for learning, and the perfect time to ask questions to your manager, other department managers, program managers and peers. It's as if you're holding a special "Ask any question you want" card that gives you special permission to ask questions. Use that card to ask questions and learn as much as you can about the company's culture, goals, and internal processes, as well as your manager's expectations.

MYTH #2: MY MANAGER KNOWS WHAT HE WANTS – AND WILL ASK FOR IT

Most employees think this, but it's actually not true. Consider things from your manager's perspective and you'll realize that his world can be just as crazy and high pressured as yours, even more so. He may not have time to stop the hamster wheel long enough to sit down and fully explain your role, responsibilities and how to get the job done. Or, he may think that the roller coaster is running at full speed, and it's your responsibility to learn how to jump on board.

As you look ahead into the next Chapter in your career, get determined to take responsibility for your own integration and success. Schedule time with your new manager to get clear on his expectations. Spend time building strong positive relationships with your manager and colleagues. Ask for help when you need it.

KNOW THE WARNING SIGNS

You can take more control of your career by not only looking for ways to set yourself up for success, but also by looking for warning signs that your job may be in jeopardy. The faster you realize that your

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job could be in jeopardy, the faster you'll be able to bounce back and get your career back on track. Specifically, there are four warning signs you should know -

1. Changes in the environment.

When funding or programs get cut or outsourced, it's a sign that an organization is re-prioritizing and looking for ways to cut costs. If Sr. leaders are meeting behind closed doors and not sharing why, or if they seem distracted or more stressed out than usual, it could be a sign that a lay-off is coming. Pay attention to rumors about upcoming lay-offs. One of the biggest mistakes I made was sticking my head in the sand and thinking that if I didn't acknowledge the rumor, then it wouldn't happen. I was wrong.

2. Changes in your scope.

If you start getting put on lower visibility, or lower valued projects your job may be in jeopardy. Ask your manager what the highest priority projects are in the department, and then try to negotiate your way onto those programs and teams. By making big contributions on the highest priority projects, you'll be setting yourself up for success and helping to secure a position on the organizational chart.

3. Changes in your influence.

If your manager or Sr. Leaders stop asking for your input, it's a big red flag that your credibility, and your job, are in jeopardy. If they don't value your input or stop including you in meetings that you've always attended, those are also big warning signs.

I remember at the Advertising Agency I attended weekly meetings with the President, Creative Director and Finance Director. One morning I walked into the conference room for our meeting just as they were walking out. As he passed by me, the President told me they had decided to start the meeting one hour earlier. I knew right then that I was about to be cut from the team.

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4. Changes in your physical reaction.

Not only do our minds pick up warning signs, but our bodies can also give us big clues. When you get a knot in your stomach driving into work, or headaches on Monday mornings, or your hands start sweating or shaking during meetings with your manager – those are physical signs that something is definitely wrong. We all have a built-in hardware system that monitor our surroundings and when something is off, your body sends out alarms.

Even though it was a very confusing and frustrating time for me during the 3-bang lay-offs, the experience provided me with two extremely powerful insights –

1. Managing expectations is everything.

The most important lesson I learned from my experience was how critical it is to manage expectations. To set yourself up for success in any job you need to be very, very clear on what your manager expects from you by asking questions like, *What would you like me to deliver next week? What would you like me to deliver next month?*

If you feel pressured during those first three months by your manager or peers who think that you should be performing at a faster rate say something like, *I appreciate your patience with me as I ramp into my new role.*

Not only do you want to meet your manager's expectations, but you want to strive to *exceed* those expectations by proposing new ideas to streamline costs, generate revenue or gain market share. By exceeding your manager's expectations, proposing new ideas and delivering results you will be viewed as a valued contributor by your manager.

2. Getting laid off is not the end of the journey.

Getting laid off is not the end of the journey. And, getting re-hired is not the end of the journey. Getting laid off is simply a stepping off point, and where you go next is up to you.

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I use to think that once somebody hired me, I would live happily ever after in that organization. What I learned was that once inside a new company, the first 6-months are a critical period of learning, transitioning and setting myself up for success.

CHAPTER 2

Soul Searching



After I had lost each of my jobs, I couldn't get over the fact that my world had completely crumbled and yet everyone around me was still going about their daily routines as if nothing had happened. Everyone else still left for work each morning to go to their job. Everyone else still went to the gym, shopping mall and movies every week-end. Everyone else had the same routine and the same life that they always had. Nothing had changed for them. Everything had changed for me.

My world had completely vanished. No job. No to-do list. No calendar to manage. There was nothing for me to do but just sit around and think. *Why? Why me? How come? What if?* Think about the past. Think about the future. Think about all the choices I had made. It was time to reflect and do some serious soul searching.

Okay, so I missed the boat on managing expectations with my manager. I spent way too much time buried inside my cube reading job aids, training manuals and taking on-line training instead of building

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relationships with my manager, Sr. leaders and peers. And, I foolishly thought that asking for help would take away my credibility.

Did that mean that I was a lousy employee? Or, that I should be jobless for the rest of my life? Of course not! So in order to get my groove back I needed to do figure out what the problem was, fix it, and then get on with my next career move.

THE SITUATION

I had hit bottom. My self-worth was at an all-time low, and part of me was craving to take any low-stress, low-challenging, steady job. I studied the flyer posted at my local grocery store for the position of doggie-park-pooper-scooper. I knew I could get *that job*, and at least it would give me a steady paycheck where I could move out of my parents' house and not deal with the roller coaster ride of getting, and potentially losing, my next job.

Yet deep down inside I knew that I would never be happy in an un-challenging job where I couldn't flex my professional muscles, and wouldn't have that shot of being Buzz Lightyear taking an organization to "infinity and beyond!" Deep down inside I knew that I had what it takes to be a fantastic marketing manager that helped an organization thrive – all I needed was the right opportunity with the right manager.

So I had a long, hard talk with myself and my cat Gracie. We decided that in order for me to get my career back on track I was going to have to do three things. First, crawl out from underneath the bed and go back out into the real world. *Yikers!* Second, forgive those in my past who I thought had treated me unfairly. Third, give myself permission (and confidence) to move forward.

THE STRATEGY

After I assessed each of the 3-bang layoffs and identified a few areas where I could learn, develop and do-better-next-time, the next thing I needed to do was deal with all of the negative feelings that had built up inside me. I was feeling a lot of anger, resentment, shame,

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frustration, low self-esteem, embarrassment and a bucket load of bitterness from my previous lay-offs. If I didn't confront and manage those emotions they were bound to bubble up in my networking opportunities and job interviews.

FORGIVING OTHERS

My first step was forgiveness. Forgiving others who had, I felt, treated me unfairly.

I started looking at the situation from each of my manager's perspectives. Many companies were just trying to survive so organizational re-structuring, downsizing and over-working employees had become standard practice in most businesses. At the end of the day, Sr. leaders and managers are just trying to keep their own job, because they, too, have a mortgage, car payment and kids' college education to pay. When it comes to lay-offs, all managers are focusing on doing everything they can to keep their own job, even if that means eliminating someone else's.

I began to realize that in one of my jobs, it may not have been anything I did that caused the lay-off, but simply because my name was in the wrong box on the wrong org chart at the wrong time.

As I started looking at the bigger picture and gaining more clarity on the "why" of each of my lay-offs, I started slowly, purposefully putting down my guard and making peace with what had happened.

I grabbed a sheet of notebook paper and started scribbling, *I am on my journey. They are on their journey.* "They" stood for my direct managers and Sr. leaders of the organization. I must have written that about a thousand times before it gradually started seeping in. I was on my own personal journey through this universe, and they were on their personal journey.

Although I wasn't quite sure why my journey had plopped me inside those organizations, I was sure that I learned valuable insights from those experiences, and now the Universe had a bigger plan for me. The universe was telling me that my journey had a new destination.

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FORGIVING MYSELF

Along with forgiving others, I also needed to forgive myself. I needed to forgive myself for failing. I wasn't perfect. I wasn't indispensable. I didn't know everything I thought I did. It's such a humbling feeling when you realize that you're expendable to an organization.

I knew that I had to stop beating myself up, so I made a conscious decision to stop obsessing over things I should have done. I stopped replaying scenes in my mind and tapes in my head, defending my actions and behaviors. I told myself that I performed the best I could under those new and difficult circumstances. I had navigated my way through each of those jobs, in each of those very different management chains and company cultures, the best way I knew how. Although the outcome wasn't what I wanted, that didn't mean I wasn't smart or talented. It simply meant that I needed to learn from those experiences and become smarter about how I worked and the value I added to an organization.

And so with all of that, I forgave myself. I forgave myself for not knowing what I thought I should have known. For not doing what I thought I should have done so that the company could see me as invaluable. I released those negative feelings of shame, anger and embarrassment that was placing on myself and gave complete faith that new doors and opportunities would open. My career *would* have a next chapter. The faster I could forgive, the faster I would begin that next chapter.

BELIEVING IN MYSELF

The next step for me was figuring out how to deal with some very big insecurities that had bubbled up inside of me. Fear of rejection, fear of failing in a new job, fear of change, fear of the unknown, and the list goes on. A voice inside me started saying things like, *Who am I to apply for that job? Who am I to get that job? Who am I to work for that*

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company? I began suffering from a major case of what I call the “Who am I?” syndrome.

In order to jump start my new career I had to find a way to address those insecurities and quiet those voices in my head. I had to find a way to really believe in myself again. What I needed was a boost of self confidence and encouragement.

I reached out to past colleagues, managers and peers who I trusted and I asked each one, *Could you share with me any good qualities that you think I offer to an organization?* What I received was an overwhelming amount of support and praise. During those conversations, I was able to recognize that my insecurities and self-doubt were based on other people’s *mis*-perceptions who had only known me for a short period of time, and didn’t know my true strengths and value that I could offer. Those pep talks led me to realize that life is way too short to work for people who don’t value and appreciate you.

As I started letting go of those insecurities that had built up, I also began searching back in my past to find a time when I had felt confident, and what those circumstances had been.

I’m competitive by nature. I grew up on a small farm with an older brother. We were bored. A lot. So we’d play all kinds of games, usually ending in him crushing me at something – from ping pong to tiddlywinks I was usually the big loser in the family. But when I started playing tennis, something happened. I actually became *good* at it. I started beating him. I learned confidence and I learned what winning felt like. In fact, I began beating all kinds of players, some who actually had better strokes than I did, but I won because I had a stronger inner confidence than they did. I *believed* I could win.

Tennis also taught me to stay in the match, because so often the momentum would suddenly shift. For no reason at all, my opponent would start slamming winners from across the net. Game after game I would be on the defensive and nothing I could do would thwart off their service winners or passing shots. Then, suddenly, for no reason at all, the momentum would shift and my opponent would start dumping their shots into the net. Just as quickly as their shots had been winners, they now suddenly couldn’t win a point. Time after time, I would win

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simply because I stayed in the match, determined, resilient, believing that the momentum would shift in my favor and that I *would win*.

As I was soul searching, I realized that buried way down deep in my soul, I had that same kind of belief in myself when it came to my career. Because of the 3-bang lay-offs, that belief had been squelched down, but I absolutely knew that the momentum was going to shift and that I was going to “win” in my career.

From that moment on, I released those negative feeling and insecurities that had built up. I allowed myself to daydream about new possibilities in my career. I gave myself permission to move ahead. And whenever the voice crept up saying, *Who am I to apply for that job?* I answered it right back by saying, *I’m Sherri Thomas! And if that company has an opening and is going to hire somebody –why shouldn’t it be me?*

LESSONS LEARNED

Everyone has experienced a career setback such as a lay-off, demotion, or getting transitioned into a less than desirable job role. The difference between someone who has a successful career and someone who does not, is that the successful person picks herself up after a setback, leaves the past in the past, sets a new course and then goes after it. The unsuccessful professional stays stuck, with a negative victim-like attitude, and bewildered why they aren’t getting more job opportunities.

At times, it can be tempting to live in a small world, doing small work, and setting small expectations for yourself. It would be easy to adopt the “Who am I?” syndrome, give up on your career goals, and revert to accepting menial jobs performing menial tasks.

But then who wins?

You sure don’t.

The way to bounce back into a new career is to learn from setbacks and do better next time. It’s those darkest moments after a setback that allow you to do some serious soul searching. Reflect back and identify those situations where you could have, should have, behaved or

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performed differently. Recognize ways you could have gained bigger results, taken on more responsibilities or added more value to the department. Identify conversations you could have responded differently and built a more positive relationship with your manager, peers, customers or Sr. leaders. Reflect on circumstances that you could have handled differently to build more credibility and influence with others.

Once you “get” what you need to get, then get on with it! Get on with building the next step in your career. Get on with searching for, and grabbing onto, that next great opportunity. Get on with being the success you were meant to be.

The only person who can really hold you back after a setback is *you*. Likewise, the only person who can give you permission and the confidence you need to move forward in your career is *you*.

CHAPTER 3

Riding the Roller Coaster



So how did I actually go from the 3-bang lay-offs to becoming a Regional Marketing Manager for American Express?

By remembering one thing that catapulted me out of my funk. I may have been laid off three times, but that meant I was *hired* three times. I was good at getting hired! (Apparently, it was the keeping-the-job-part that was the stumper.)

Now that I had some of my confidence back, a little bit of clarity on each of my lay-offs and this new realization that I'm good at getting hired, I walked outside (something I hadn't done in quite some time) and declared to the world, *I'M TAKING BACK CONTROL OF MY CAREER!!*

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THE SITUATION

But it wasn't that easy. As frustrating as it is to be laid off, it's even more frustrating trying to find and land your next job. It's as if when you're laid off you get hit by a freight train of rejection. And then you get pummeled with 100 more aftershocks of rejection from the time you get laid off to the time you land your next job.

Throughout my journey during the 3-bang lay-offs, I heard about job openings that made my heart flutter. Everything down deep in my bones told me that this was my new job. The job I was *meant* to be in. The job I was born to have.

As I applied for each of those jobs and submitted my resume, my imagination would soar. I saw myself working in that new fabulous job, having a new fabulous manager and even a new fabulous life. It was exhilarating. I was excited when I woke up every morning to go into my new job. Suddenly, my whole world made sense! I realized that my lay-off actually did happen for a reason – because I was *meant* to work over there.

So I would apply for my new job. The one I was certain to get. The one that was created just for me. I'd send in my resume and then wait. My heart would pound a little faster over the next day or two. I'd be in a better mood, knowing the call was coming for me to be interviewed. I'd check my e-mail and phone at least 50 times a day.

Days passed. Nothing. A week went by. Nothing. Two weeks. Nothing.

It's like my resume went into some big black hole somewhere. No phone call. Not even an acknowledgement that the company had received it. I'd be devastated. Angry. Crushed. *How could they not call me? I was perfect that job. P-E-R-F-E-C-T.* It didn't make any sense. It was as if the universe was putting me through some sort of test to see how much rejection, confusion and humiliation I could take.

GETTING THE INTERVIEW

Even when I would get the opportunity to interview for a job, the freight train of frustration continued – *Next stop, rejection-ville.*

The worst experience I had ever had interviewing was after I lost my job at the TV station in Monterey. At that time, I had put my radio career as a disc jockey behind me, but when I got laid off and needed a job, I resurrected the idea of getting back into the industry. I heard about an opening at WLUP FM, the Loop radio station in Chicago. They needed an afternoon drive DJ so I applied. I continued my job search applying for all kinds of jobs in the TV and radio industry, but nothing was happening. I started sinking into a deep depression. I started sleeping a lot as a coping mechanism to escape my misery.

Then, one morning I was awoken from a deep sleep at 9:00am (did I mention that I slept a lot?) It was a DJ from WLUP FM in Chicago. I sat up straight in bed. My heart was pounding a thousand beats a minute as he explained that we were live on the air with 100,000 listeners listening in on our phone call. He said that he had my resume in front of him and was conducting a live interview with me to see if I was “Loop-worthy.”

My brain was barely thinking, my heart was pounding, the sheets were twisted up around me in the bed, and so the live interview began. *Why do you think you'd make a good disc jockey at the Loop?* he asked. Think, think, think was the only thing my brain was saying. *Uh, well,* I sputtered out. *Because... apparently... I can tell pretty good stories... and sometimes I can be pretty funny,* I said.

Oh really? he said in his deep, sarcastic, narcissistic DJ voice. *Well then how about if you tell us a funny story RIGHT NOW???*

Needless to say, I completely blew the interview. I was mortified. Completely humiliated. Not only was I jobless in Monterey, but now I was cheap entertainment and the entire population in Chicago thought I was a loser.

Interviewing is a completely humbling experience. You have no control and no power. At its best, it teaches us humility and resiliency.

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After my 3rd lay-off at the accounting firm, I was grateful for the opportunity to interview for a job I knew I was meant to have. It was a copywriter position at an advertising agency that had the Phoenix Suns as one of their major accounts. Writing television, radio and print ads for a professional basketball team was my dream job. I had been the men's basketball team sports reporter for my Jr. college newspaper and it seemed like all of my previous experiences and personal passions, and everything I had ever done in my life had led me right here to this interview. All of the planets were perfectly aligned and I was meant to be right here, right now.

I couldn't have been more excited. I couldn't have been more perfect for the job. I couldn't have been more rejected.

From the second the hiring manager saw me, I knew that she wasn't going to offer me the job. I smiled, I told her stories about my brilliant successes at advertising agencies and showed her examples of the award winning commercials I had written at the TV and radio stations where I had worked.

None of it mattered. She barely looked at me. She barely spoke to me. Once in a while she would awkwardly blurt out, *Uh-huh*, or *Got it*. She didn't want to look at me. She didn't want to talk to me. She simply didn't want me.

Another bad interview came much later in my career when I was interviewing for an internal transfer at a company where I had worked for 12 years. The position was creating and maintaining strategic roadmaps for one of the divisions and I was well suited and well positioned to get the job. I had a terrific interview with a Sr. leader! We connected. We sparked. It was my best interview ever!

Then, one hour later I had one of the worst interviews of my life with the hiring manager. She asked me the exact same questions and I gave the exact same answers I had just given to the Sr. leader. But there was no connection. No spark. She didn't think I was special. She thought I was plain. Boring. Average.

There's no rhyme or reason in interviewing. Sometimes what happens, happens, and it just doesn't make any sense. Do things really happen for a reason? Probably, but when you're searching for a new job those reasons can be impossible to understand.

GETTING THE OFFER

Even when my interviews went great there have been times that I still didn't get the job. One time, I got a call from an Operations Manager at a radio station in Colorado Springs who wanted to hire me as their new midday disc jockey. The interview went great and he said he'd call me the following week with the offer. I daydreamed about what my new life would be like in a new city. More skiing, more bike riding, more tennis, more friends, more fun! On the eighth day, I still hadn't heard from him so I called the station. He had been fired. His replacement didn't know anything about me or the midday position.

Another time, I got a call from a good friend of mine who worked at a software company. Her department was looking to hire a leadership coach and she was recommending me. I had a great recommendation and an excellent resume. I met the VP for lunch and a week later had a follow-up phone interview with her.

The job was a heartbeat away and the only other next step was to meet with the Sr. VP the following week after he returned from India. I waited for the phone call telling me where and when I should meet the Sr. VP. I anxiously waited. And waited. A sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach told me something was wrong. Two weeks later I got a call from the VP saying the job was being put on hold. It disappeared. Vanished. Just like my future.

Even jobs that are a sure thing can vanish. I had a friend who lived in Santa Monica and had been a VP at Warner Brothers before she was laid off due to a company merger and organizational restructuring. She sent her resume to a company in Florida and had two phone interviews with the President. He flew her out, introduced her around the office and showed her the new organizational chart with her name in the box as the new VP of Marketing. He then took her out to lunch and told her at the airport to expect the offer in the next day or two.

Four days later, she wrote to him asking when the offer would arrive. He said he was surprised she hadn't seen it yet, and said he would notify his VP of Sales to get the offer out that afternoon. She contacted moving trucks, ordered boxes and started searching on-line

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for homes in Ft. Lauderdale. Five days later she wrote to the President again saying she had not yet received the offer. Five days after that she wrote again. The offer never came. The President, and the offer and the job had all somehow just vanished.

**EVEN WHEN YOU HAVE THE JOB,
YOU STILL MAY NOT HAVE THE JOB.**

Just like offers can disappear, jobs can disappear. I have a good friend, Rich, who I met at Arizona State University when we both were getting our Broadcasting degrees. My dream was to become a wildly successful disc jockey, and his dream was to become a wildly successful TV news anchor.

After graduation, Rich interviewed at a TV station near Phoenix for a reporter position. One week later, he got a call from the General Manager's administrative assistant saying that the General Manager had been called out of town on business, but that he wanted her to call Rich and offer him the job.

Rich was thrilled. His heart was pounding. He asked how much the salary was and she said \$15,000 annual. His heart stopped pounding.

He said that he wanted the job, but that he needed a day or two to get his finances in order and put together a financial plan so that he could afford to live on his new salary. The next day the administrative assistant called Rich and told him she had just offered the position to the runner-up candidate. He hadn't been excited enough about the job offer so she, not the General Manager, had made the decision to offer the position to someone else.

Sometimes the world doesn't make sense.

When I was in my twenties I had a roommate, Tim, who was an Accountant at a prestigious resort in Phoenix. He'd worked there for a couple of years when he read about a job opening that was his dream job – working as an analyst for a new global bank that had just opened. Tim applied and out of 200 applicants he got the job! Two weeks later he lost the job.

THE BOUNCE BACK

He was let go because he was graduating in 3 months with a degree in Accounting. There was a box on the application that said, *Degree? Yes. No.* He checked the box “yes” since he would be graduating in 3 months. The bank said that he had falsified information and should have written “will be graduating in 3 months.”

THE STRATEGY

The strategy is resiliency. The strategy is to expect a roller coaster ride of possibilities, what if’s, and *Sorry, we’re giving the job to someone else.*

I’m not sharing these stories to make you fearful of being in the job market. I’m sharing these stories to help understand that if any of these things happen to you – you are not alone. These situations are common and they happen all the time. ALL THE TIME.

As you prepare for the next step in your career, expect the unexpected. There’s a new level of frustration you’re faced with in the job market, and the only way to get over it is to go through it.

Whether you hear good news, bad news or no news – act with dignity and grace. Believe in yourself and your abilities. Believe in your future. Never let defeat push you off the roller coaster.

Every day you’ll need to put on a big coat of armor. In every interview, put on your best acting face so that hiring managers don’t see the frustration, aggravation or desperation boiling over inside of you. Job offers are given to those who remain cool, calm and confident.

Every day you’re in the job market is a day of riding a roller coaster. You’ll need to fight the desire to stay curled up in bed all day, and instead push yourself to climb on board and ride the wave of ups and downs.

LESSONS LEARNED

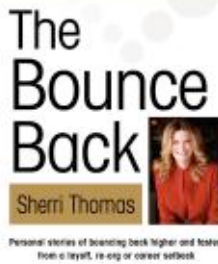
Whenever you think you have a for sure thing, continue chasing down and running after every job lead and job opening that comes

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within a 500-mile radius of where you are. Just because your Aunt Matilda told you that you're going to be the new VP of Operations at the local Porkypottus Restaurant Food Chain because she recommended you to the President who is her best friend and neighbor, doesn't mean that you have a job or that you should stop your job search.

Don't waste one second of your time sitting back and waiting for a phone call or e-mail to come your way. You have to get out there and pound the streets every day for more job leads, recommendations and referrals. For every 100 resumes you send, maybe you'll five interviews. And out of every 10 interviews, maybe you'll get one job offer. And sometimes, even that one job offer can still fall through.

The job market is unfair, inconsistent, and most of all, doesn't make any sense. The only certainty is that there is no certainty. There are no for-sure deals. You don't have a job until you've signed the offer and walked in the door for your first day of work. Even then, it's still not a for-sure thing.



In today's tough job market, this book is an insider's guide to building a fresh new start in your career. Whether you've suffered the devastation of being laid off, the frustration of working for a bad manager, or the exasperation of being stuck in a job where you're undervalued and unappreciated, this book provides inspirational stories from the author and 13 other professionals who have successfully taken back control, and bounced back in their career.

THE BOUNCE BACK

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