

# CULTIVATING CAREERS

By Karen Kodzik

## Helpful Ways for Families and Spouses to Support the Unemployed Job Seeker

Karen Kodzik, Career Management Consultant and Owner of Cultivating Careers, has worked with thousands of professionals in career transition for more than 13 years. One thing that has become more evident in this latest recession is that the impact of a layoff doesn't just affect the unemployed; it affects up to four times as many people if you count spouses, partners and families. When the news of a layoff hits a home, family members go through their own emotional chaos ranging from fear to anxiety to sadness — often cloaked by a cheery face and well-meaning words of encouragement.

Kodzik, who has a master's degree in counseling, acknowledges family members who feel helpless and don't know what to expect in the upcoming months, much less what to do to help. Below she offers some examples of helpful ways to support a job seeking family member.

### Tip #1

Remind the job seeker of their great qualities and many successes. Self-esteem is often greatly damaged after a layoff. Job seekers need a lot of affirmations especially if the layoff wasn't their fault.

### Tip #2

Ask how you can help in the search effort. Let the jobseeker tell you what will be helpful. Don't make assumptions or offer unsolicited advice.

### Tip #3

Offer to proofread their resume and cover letters. Job seekers look at these documents so many times that they can easily overlook obvious errors.

### Tip #4

Recognize that family roles may change during this time. The roles of primary bread winner and household manager may get reversed. Discuss this openly. Re-establish roles and responsibilities, guidelines for spending, and expectations for parenting and other household responsibilities.

### Tip #5

Understand that the emotional ups and downs are an inherent part of job search. Both the job seeker and family member may experience these swings. Mood and energy swings can happen daily and persist for months. Implement healthy coping strategies to remain centered and resilient.

### Tip #6

Offer to contact your own network to help the job seeker make connections. The most effective job search activity is making connections with people who can help link job seekers to companies, opportunities and inside decision makers. A job seeker's network expands exponentially when they can include their spouse's network.

#### Tip #7

Of all the tips she offers, the biggest one is open communication from both sides. From the job seeker side, let your spouse and family know how you are going to approach your search, keep them apprised of your progress, discuss adjustments in household spending, address their fears and concerns. From the family side, be open about your fears and concerns; use an "ask don't tell" approach. Bring issues to the forefront immediately and don't let them brew.

Finally, job seekers need reminding that you care about them no matter what and that you will get through this time — together.

For more information about Karen's consulting services for active career management or her free Team Family support groups, visit [www.cultivatingcareers.com](http://www.cultivatingcareers.com) or call 651-387-2676