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GRIEVING THE LOSS OF A JOB OR MUSIC POSITION

Joy Schroeder

IN MY FORMER role of Michigan District Convener and now as Coordinator of Education for Region V, I have encountered many people who have parted from their jobs or music positions much faster than they wanted to. Some were fired, some were "encouraged out the door," and some left because of illness or other personal reasons. But all had hoped to remain on the job longer.

We all know these folks. Some of them speak of their former employers in less than complimentary terms. Others gossip about former positions, the new employees, or former choir members. Happily, there are others who put the loss behind them and move on to other positions, even careers in other fields. I knew a man in an AGO chapter who, having been through quite a difficult "walk out the door," went back to school to study in a different field, excelled in it, and returned to organ playing and choir directing for part-time work and enjoyment. He did not bemoan his loss but instead grew into new experiences and rewards.

Not everyone can move on so easily. Society rarely sees a job loss for what it really is—a LOSS! There are those who suffer deeply from the grief. There is grief in the loss of a position in a denomination or in society, grief in the loss of friends in the workplace, grief in the loss of making music in one's own (or a previous) way, and grief in the loss of income. Since a job will often occupy more time during the day than most other activities, losing one, for whatever reason, can be huge. Such a loss needs to be recognized by the person experiencing it, and that person needs time to work through the ensuing emotions.

Years ago, Dr. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross in her ground-breaking book, *On Death and Dying*,¹ defined stages of grief that people with a fatal illness may experience. Listed below are those stages and a comparison with what may occur with losing a job:

Stages	When Faced with a Job Loss
1. Denial	"They can't mean me."
2. Anger	"I don't deserve this; what are they thinking?"
3. Bargaining	"If I wait (to get a degree, keep quiet . . .), they will have me back."

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| 4. Depression | "I'm never going to get another job; I'll never get over this." |
| 5. Acceptance ² | "I'll apply for another job (get another degree, take a vacation, or . . .) just for ME!" |

The author also said that not all of the stages will be experienced by those facing a terminal illness. The stages might follow a different pattern or jump back and forth from one to another.³ Importantly, a grief process should not be rushed since each person is different.⁴

Dr. Roberta Temes in her book, *Living with an Empty Chair: A Guide Through Grief*,⁵ writes of three types of behavior exhibited by those suffering from grief and loss, particularly as they relate to cancer. However, note the similarities when one is faced with a job loss:

Stages	When Faced with a Job Loss
1. Numbness	When first learning of the job loss.
2. Disorganization	"What is happening? Why?" or confusion.
3. Reorganization ⁶	Coming to accept the situation.

Here are some suggestions that may help:

Read, and re-read the stages of grief above. Job loss is a LOSS. Acknowledge your feelings. Don't be ashamed of them. They are real.

Consult useful Web sites that may be helpful for practical issues, such as insurance and other problems: http://careerplanning.about.com/od/jobless/a/job_loss.htm and www.rileyguide.com/cope.html.

Another Web site to consult deals with rebuilding self-esteem, taking "creative" action, and becoming a survivor: www.thrivenet.com/articles/jloss.shtml.

Local libraries have many books on the subject. One that presents personal stories of job loss is Louis Uchitelle's *The Disposable American* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006). Included are stories of traumatized individuals, people who returned to the workforce in jobs they didn't like, people who returned to better jobs, and people whose hobbies became very important to them after losing a job. Another book, *Not*

Working: An Oral History of the Unemployed (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1979), by Harry Maurer contains personal stories of those who are suddenly out of work, and presents some of their "schemes to get by." Another book about general losses in life is Lucy Freeman's *The Sorrow and the Fury: Overcoming Hurt and Loss from Childhood to Old Age* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1978). This book includes wisdom about handling the losses in life; one of the suggestions is talking with others and writing about it.

A Web site with a list of many books that may be useful is www.ca.uky.edu/hes/fcs/factshts/fam-gw.133.pdf.

Recognize that the person who has lost a job may be subject to an increased risk of health-related illnesses and other behavioral issues. In his book *The Psychology of Death, Dying, and Bereavement* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1978), Robert Schulz says, "A study . . . showed an accumulation of life events was positively correlated with behavioral indicators of stress such as drinking and traffic accidents."

Decide if professional counseling is needed. Rely on friends, family, and other musicians. There is never enough time to do everything you want to. So find something that needs doing or that has been waiting for you to have time to do. Importantly, consult others who have walked this path ahead of you. They have tremendous advice. Listen. See if it works for you. Their advice may well be the best, for they have literally "been there."

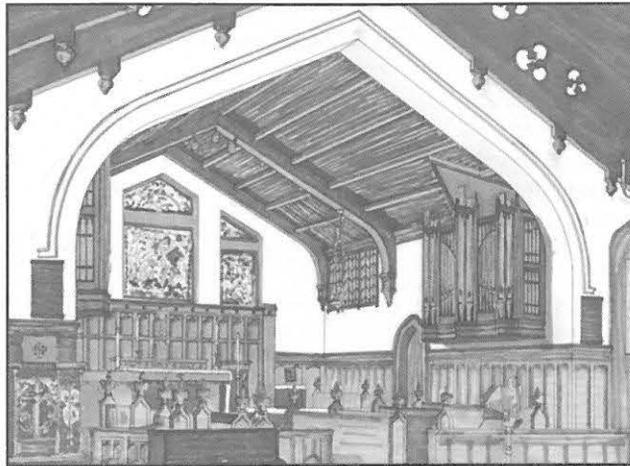
Finally, ponder the words of Donna Wernz, former chairperson of the AGO's Career Development and Support Committee. "What seems and feels like a disaster is really a transition or an introduction to something better for our lives, but we can't see that until enough time has passed, so that we can look back with clear vision and thinking. Then we will also be ready to help someone else!"

NOTES

1. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, MD, *On Death and Dying* (New York: Touchstone, 1969). Reprinted several times in hardcover, paperback, and in Kindle.
2. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kubler-Ross_model.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Roberta Temes, *Living with an Empty Chair: A Guide Through Grief*, 6th edition (Far Hills, N.J.: New Horizon Press, 1992).
6. See www.cancersurvivors.org/Coping/end%20term/stages.htm.

Joy Schroeder is director of the AGO Committee on Seminary and Denominational Relations. Her committee presented a workshop on communication at the 2008 AGO National Convention in Minneapolis. She is also the Chair of Education for Region V.

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