*Legal Information Management*, 9 (2009), pp. 141–143
© The British and Irish Association of Law Librarians Printed in the United Kingdom doi:10.1017/S1472669609000346

# Checklist - Coping with Redundancy

**Abstract:** Suzanne Wheatley, Senior Consultant at Sue Hill Recruitment, describes the processes of redundancy from different perspectives. She discusses its potential effect on the individual and offers plenty of practical advice on how to deal with it, how to prepare for a new job and how it could potentially be an opportunity for change.
**Keyword:** redundancy

## Introduction



*Suzanne Wheatley*

It used to be a phrase uttered in hushed tones and with eyes looking down at the floor, but these days the words "I've been made redundant" are commonplace. The Chartered Management Institute reported that 73% of managers say there is now less stigma attached to redundancy than there was in the 1990s.[1] Is there now less embarrassment surrounding the word because we are so used to hearing it? Everyone knows someone who has been affected by redundancy, but what do you do if it is you? I am not an expert on legal rights, but my colleagues and I meet people on a daily basis who are dealing with redundancy and I can see the strategies and attitudes that lead to survival. I am going to look at the big picture of redundancy, how it affects all those involved and how you can move on from it with success.

## Decision makers

Redundancies are the result of a business decision to cut costs and make savings. Reduction in headcount is the most obvious and immediate way to achieve this and is the financial approach that is most usually taken. It is commonly a last resort as salary costs are generally the largest budget line item. The decision to make staff redundant should not be made on a personal level, but the end result is incredibly personal to those affected. All aspects of the organisation will be considered and, as we can see from the news in early 2009, no-one is exempt from consideration. Profitability is the key word for partners in City law firms. At the time of writing, thelawyer.com reported 2,751 redundancies across the legal sector this year.[2] How does this affect information professionals? The viability of your service will be assessed. What value does it add?

## Employers/managers

In the course of researching this article I went to a very interesting seminar run by CILIP's Commercial, Legal & Scientific Information Group (CLSIG) about redundancies. I learnt several things during the evening, more on which later, but one of the points that stuck in my mind was the effect on the manager who has to deliver the news of redundancies. This angle is not often explored, but in looking at the process from decision-making to redundancy package, it cannot be ignored. Invariably the decision is made by senior management and unfortunately it is sometimes passed on to middle management to break the news. If you have had to do this, you may have felt a bit like the Wicked Witch of the West. As a manager you have to remain professional and are unable to show emotion. Underneath it is most likely that you are as upset as the colleagues you have to tell. The manager becomes the messenger. It is vital therefore that the manager has the full backing and support of HR and senior management in order that no animosity is held towards them. I would hope that managers who are required to notify staff about redundancies are given adequate training, so that the message is given clearly and concisely. There is no doubt that there will be a negative impact on employees following news of redundancy, but the manner of the delivery of that information is crucial.

Following the announcement of redundancies, the manager will need to adjust to manage their remaining workforce after the process has been completed. This may well be difficult, potentially dealing with unhappy staff and an increased workload, or indeed the closure of a service. Talking to colleagues in the industry faced with the latter scenario, there can be a sense of bewilderment and loss, as the service you have nurtured and developed is simply left hanging. How do you cope with this? Communication is the key. Keep a good relationship with your team. Be realistic with them. Explain the business decisions and how you have been involved. The team will need you to put your arms around them but who will do that for you? As a manager, it's most likely that there will be no-one. Having a mentor within your organisation, or in the profession, can be a great sounding-board and offers you a different perspective perhaps to the one you may get at home with family or friends. It is never too



https://doi.org/10.1017/S1472669609000346 Published online by Cambridge University Press

late to develop a relationship with a mentor. Again, use your network!

## Employees

### Process and your rights

There is a clearly defined process which should be followed by employers when dealing with redundancy. In a collective redundancy, when an employer proposes to make more than 20 or more employees redundant over 90 days or less, as an employee you have the right to expect to be consulted. At this point I will direct you to ACAS[3] or the Directgov portal[4] which give advice and guidance on your rights to consultation, selections and notice periods. I think it is a good idea to seek impartial advice and guidance on the redundancy process, as it helps you to understand what is happening and will hopefully give you the confidence to survive the redundancy. Never assume that your employer has got it right.

### Reactions

The first reaction and emotion to be experienced after hearing that you're being made redundant is likely to be shock and disbelief, followed swiftly by anger. This anger can linger and become a very powerful emotion. Sometimes it may prove overpowering and become too much of a feature, making it difficult to move on. Quite often people can associate losing a job through redundancy with a loss of identity. If you have been in a company for a long time, you lose perspective on your value and the skills you have. You can become institutionalised. This can also be a struggle to overcome. Consider my next points in order to cope with this.

### How to move on and where to get help

In order to present yourself to a potential new employer in the best possible light, you must first deal with your feelings about the redundancy. Take time to accept the loss of your job and to overcome any negative feelings about the decision and the decision-makers. As much as is possible, put these feelings in a metaphorical box and out of sight. Grieve for your job then put it away. It is not life or death, it is just a job. The job has gone. Not you. This sounds harsh, but if you look at it from a slightly different perspective, if you found a new job, you would feel sad about leaving your current post for a short period of time and then look forward to the new challenge. You then find that you are ready to go forwards and to move on in a positive frame of mind. Look back at your achievements in the job and the positive impact you had on the service, the department and the organisation, and how the role helped you to develop professionally and personally. Realising what you have achieved and what skills and knowledge you have gained, will build your confidence, thus feeding into the positive attitude and ability to move on.

The CLSIG seminar on redundancy was a perfect example of where to go to get help and support. Whether you are a solo information professional or part of a large team, getting support from colleagues is priceless. You can find this in professional associations and special interest groups. The benefit of being a member of one of these groups is that you have a ready-made network of colleagues. Attend meetings, talk to someone new each time, and get involved in committees. All of this again builds confidence and morale. It struck me at the seminar that there was a real sense of community. It was agreed that Chatham House rules applied, so anything that was said would remain confidential and in the room. This provided an open and honest platform for sharing and exchanging views. I think we all left feeling that we could call upon each other for advice and support in tough times. Most importantly it was obvious that although redundancy can feel isolating, you are not alone.

### Next steps

You pick yourself up, dust yourself off and start to look for a job. But how do you do this and what do you want to do? Perhaps you are fortunate enough not to need to work straight away. It's most likely that any compensation payment will not be a life-changing amount of money, and so you will want, and need, to get straight back to work. It is vital to "sign on", even if only to get your national insurance payments. This is no time to be proud. Before you jump into something, anything, take a moment to consider your next step. I appreciate that rent and mortgages need to be paid and having an income is crucial. But think about the negative impact of jumping into "any old job" just to keep some money coming in. If you take a role that doesn't interest you, that may be a level or two lower than your last role, that pays a lower salary, will you become de-motivated, resentful or unhappy? Whilst it is important to be earning money, it is also very important to maintain your sense of self worth. Any negativity at this stage, on top of redundancy, could impact on your inner confidence and your ability to sell yourself at interview when that perfect job arrives.

This could be the perfect time to explore new opportunities. Maybe redundancy is the wake-up call you needed to move on in your career. I have been pleased to see that this positive approach is prevalent in a lot of jobseekers who are currently affected by redundancy. One factor to consider at this stage is location – have you been looking to move out of London, for example? Now you may have a good reason to do so. Think of the positives – you are probably available to work immediately. This is very attractive to employers!

### Job hunting

How do you identify the right job? First of all you need to look at your skill set and knowledge base. In order to



https://doi.org/10.1017/S1472669609000346 Published online by Cambridge University Press

market yourself correctly, you must identify what you are selling to potential employers. We all have a different set of skills. This includes not only technical skills, such as cataloguing, analysis and systems implementation, but also the vitally important, but sometimes overlooked, softer skills like negotiation and leadership. Deconstruct your most recent roles and look at what has interested and motivated you. Take a blank piece of paper and write down three skills under each of the following four headings: Good at; Enjoy; Would like to develop; Don't enjoy. By identifying what you do and don't enjoy doing, you can start to build up a picture of what job will make you get out of bed in the morning. Look at job descriptions and person specifications for roles that you see online. What skills do employers want? Which are your areas for development? If you are still at consultation stage, can you negotiate training as part of your compensation, so that you are well equipped to find a new job?

Once you have selected jobs for which you want to apply, you come to the application document. In an ideal world we all have our CVs up-to-date, charting our CPD, adding in new responsibilities and achievements at work. The reality may be somewhat different. Remember that your CV is not your life history. It must be a clear and concise document giving the reader (in the first instance this is likely to be HR) an overview of your career, highlighting skills and achievements most relevant to the job for which you are applying. Best practice dictates that this should be only two pages. Depending on the breadth of your career to date, this may be three full pages – this is acceptable. It's a good idea to have a master document which may be three or four pages long, with greater detail on your roles, responsibilities, education, skills, training, professional involvement, articles and so on, but then cut and paste the pertinent information into a shorter CV for applications. Employers want to see dates of employment, job titles, organisations and brief details about the work you did in each role. Use bullet points, keep the text punchy, avoid the use of "I" and try not to simply copy your job description.

### Interviews

Many colleagues have said to me that the interview process is the most daunting thing after redundancy, particularly as some people have been with a company for quite some time. The good news about interviews is that they don't have to be feared. Yes, there will always be the adrenalin rush and the nerves before and during an interview, but there are steps that you can take to ensure that you present yourself as well as possible. The key word here is preparation. I can't stress this enough. You would never give a presentation without preparing, so why should an interview be any different? As information professionals, you are skilled at finding, extracting and presenting information. You will be able to research the organisation and their place in the market. Then, by using your industry network, you may well be able to find out more about the team itself and any initiatives or developments currently under way. But be careful not to assume you know all about the job and the team because you have spoken to a friend. It's important to do as much research as possible.

The next step is to deconstruct the job description and person specification, looking at each criterion and addressing it with a practical example of how you have achieved or demonstrated that skill. This forms the basis of competency interviews. There is much guidance available online about this type of interview.[5] It is a very accessible type of interview for both interviewee and interviewer, as it ensures fairness and objectivity for each interviewee, and a structure for interviewers. I frequently give presentations on interview techniques and could write an article just on this subject. My top tips in one sentence are that you must be smartly presented, have a good handshake and eye contact and actively listen to the questions, answering only what you are asked. Follow up your interview by reiterating your interest in the role and, if you are not offered the role, ask for feedback and use it constructively to improve your next interview performance.

## Conclusion

Redundancy will mean rearranging your life. But you do have a choice as to what you do next. Now may be the time to take a sabbatical. Seek guidance and support from friends and colleagues.

How many more redundancies should we expect? What impact will this continue to have on the job market? I am writing this article in March, sadly without a crystal ball to hand. Ask me when you read this and I hope it will be a positive response.

On a positive note, as one door closes, there may be something new, exciting, different and life-changing just behind the next one!

www.suehill.com

## Footnotes

[1]http://www.managers.org.uk/content_1.aspx?id=10:5540&id=10:5

[2]http://209.85.229.132/search?q=cache:aYeVsZ0LkCsJ:www.thelawyer.com/item/135426+legal+redundancies&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=uk

[3]http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1365

[4]http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Employment/RedundancyAndLeavingYourJob/Redundancy/index.htm

[5]http://www.suehill.com/comp_int.htm



https://doi.org/10.1017/S1472669609000346 Published online by Cambridge University Press