

Anita Taide | Feature Story

PWR653: Newspaper and Magazine Writing

Basic Information

Slug: Layoffs Strengthening Relationships

Main Copy Word Count: 1,800

Sidebar Word Count: 317

Target Audience: Married career women, age 25 – 45

Name and Type of Publication Queried: *Redbook*, a magazine for women who are “juggling family, career and her own needs.” (as described on www.redbookmag.com)

Names and Contact Information for Interviewees

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Information on Literary Sources

Dr. Kelley Brigman
Author of *Marriage: A Simple Guide to Success*
<http://www.prlog.org/10144712-financial-crisis-causes-families-to-fail-too.html>

Beatty Cohan, MSW, LCSW
Author of *For Better, For Worse, Forever-Discover the Path to Lasting Love*
<http://askbeatty.com/author.html>
(Interviewed as well, although I did not insert any of her comments since they were redundant with others' comments)

“Some laid-off women now stay-at-home moms”

Associated Press

<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/29619137/>

“For families, layoffs shift responsibilities, roles”

Maggie Jackson

http://www.boston.com/lifestyle/family/articles/2009/02/22/for_families_layoffs_shift_responsibilities_roles/

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Word Count: 1,800

More Time to Love

Anita Taide

Michele Schrier enjoyed all the comforts of a two-income family – fancy dinners, long vacations, spontaneous trips to the mall. Little did she know that these luxuries were soon going to come to an end. In December of last year – just three days before Christmas – Michele was told by her manager that her services were no longer needed. “Why did this happen to me?” “What will my husband think?” “How will we survive?” These questions rang through Michele’s head as she walked out of her office one last time. Despite her fears, Michele was actually preparing for two of the most rewarding months in her life.

Like Michele, thousands of women have suffered the consequences of our economic crisis. According to a recent MSNBC article, more than 800,000 American women have lost their jobs since December 2007. The layoffs have hit home for many of these women, forcing them to adjust to their new schedules, responsibilities, and budgets. What few people realize is that there is a positive side to these struggles: layoffs are bringing women closer to their husbands, and are strengthening the family unit. No one knows this better than Paula Susan.

Susan is licensed in clinical social work and specializes in relationship counseling at her office in Mt. Laurel, NJ. She has seen firsthand the positive power layoffs can have on marriages. According to Susan, becoming laid off not only allows a woman to physically spend

more time with her partner, but it also connects a couple emotionally, spiritually, and psychologically. "People feel closer, feel understood, and want to share more – and now you've got the time to share," Susan states.

Ah, time. A concept Michele barely knew while she was working. On an average workday, Michele was out of the house for nearly ten hours. Apart from the demands of the work itself – Michele was a writer for a software company, where she wore many hats and faced many deadlines – she commuted an hour's drive each way. "When I got home, the only thing I felt like doing was sleeping," she admits. It didn't help that her husband worked even longer hours. As a senior supply sergeant in the National Guard, Danny Schrier works a regular 7:30 a.m. - 5 p.m. schedule during the week – plus late-night conferences, weekend hours, and out-of-town meetings. "I spend a lot of time at work and travel," says Danny. "Sometimes I'll be gone for two weeks straight."

Further, the couple faced heavy financial pressure, even though they are only in their 30's and do not have children. Michele and Danny had their share of debts and expenses – the usual credit card bills, student loan payments, home renovations ... and then there was the in vitro. Unable to conceive a child, the couple had decided the previous summer to receive fertility treatments. They scheduled the implantation for January, and wanted to make sure they had enough funds to go through with the process.

So, like millions of other American women, Michele had to work. The presence of women in the workplace is growing, according to a recent *Boston Globe* article; last year alone, women held 49 percent of the nation's jobs. The Schriers relied on Michele's income to maintain a comfortable standard of living -- even if that meant spending time apart from each other.

As hard as things were for Michele when she was working, they seemed even worse after she lost her job. Michele found it even more challenging to finance the in vitro, although she was determined to go through with it. She took this with a grain of salt, as the layoff had dampened her spirits during one of the most special moments in her life. “I dumped on myself a lot, and it bothered Danny,” admits Michele. “I was very bitter.”

Paula Susan recognizes this as a normal reaction. “People are scared and they don’t know how to talk to each other because their anxiety takes over,” she states.

After a few weeks of venting, however, reality struck: Michele actually enjoyed her time at home. No longer did she have the pressure of waking up early, or driving an hour to work, or dealing with a demanding boss.

Michele’s time at home also enabled her to pursue her dream as a fiction writer. During her junior year in college, Michele had begun to write a series of short stories; however, she had little time to work on her writing while she was employed. For the first time in many months, Michele felt a new sense of freedom. “She had the opportunity to chase her dreams and goals,” her husband acknowledges. “She didn’t have to worry about her nine to five job, doing something she didn’t want to do.”

Her father Wesley recalls seeing a more laid-back side of his daughter: “While she was working, Michele had a tendency to be more frustrated and more edgy,” he says. “What I saw when she was able to work on her own...she was more relaxed and easy-going.”

Much of Michele’s relaxation was due to the fact that she had more time to spend on herself. She caught up on her daytime TV and enjoyed long, relaxing cups of tea – neither of which she could do when she worked.

One of the things Michele realized while she was at home was how much she liked tending to Danny. Michele admits that she has never been a domestic person; however, she found herself enjoying household chores. “Being unemployed gave me a chance to do more errands, catch up on the housework, and clean up. Usually, Danny takes care of all the dishes; when I was unemployed, I was doing the dishes,” says Michele. Michele was also able to do something she hadn’t done in years: cook dinner every night. “While I was working, Danny usually made dinner,” she says. “When I was home, I would have dinner ready for him.”

Self-discovery is crucial to the healing process, says Susan. “If they get that they are not their job, that they are multi-faceted human beings, they can develop other aspects of themselves.”

Michele’s gestures did not go unnoticed. “It was nice to have her there to take care of the small things during the day that we wouldn’t have been able to do when both of us worked,” Danny says.

Meanwhile, Danny also grew comfortable in his role as a traditional breadwinner. “I was glad that I was able to provide – there are a lot of families I know that if they don’t have two incomes, they would have lost everything ... so I was grateful that I was given the opportunity to be able to support and make the budget.”

The couple also realized that they had time to communicate – not only more often, but on a deeper level. According to Beatty Cohan, nationally acknowledged relationship expert, communication is the key to a successful relationship. Cohan is the co-author of *For Better, For Worse, Forever-Discover the Path to Lasting Love*. The book is based on a ten-step formula that Cohan asserts “will change the way you look at relationships forever.” Step #4 emphasizes the importance of communication: “How well (or how badly) you and your partner are able to

express emotions like love, fear, disappointment, anger and pain will make or break your relationship." Without effective communication, says Cohan, the couple can make the situation look like a catastrophe when it is not.

Making a catastrophe of the situation is precisely what Michele did when she first discovered she was laid off. The pressures she felt were not only financial, but also personal. Michele had just received her degree in Writing Arts the summer before, and had been hired as a writer at the software company soon after graduating. She enjoyed working in her chosen field and putting her degree to work, so losing her first writing job just added to her bitterness. "I just said to myself, 'I got this degree and it's doing me a lot of good,'" she remembers.

Just when Michelle thought things couldn't get any worse, the unthinkable happened. In January 2009, just two weeks after she had been implanted with an embryo, she discovered that her in vitro had failed. "I just kept thinking, I'm not qualified as a professional, and now I can't carry a baby -- I'm not qualified as a woman," Michele says.

Michelle found it very difficult to get past these negative thoughts. But with her husband's support, Michele discovered greener pastures. "I felt like a failure, and he was letting me know that I wasn't a failure ... he helped me through my feelings a lot. If I hadn't gotten laid off, I doubt we'd have that discussion." Because of their hardships, the couple grew closer. Whether consoling each other, planning the new budget, or job hunting, they found themselves working together – as a team.

Dr. Kelley Brigman recognizes the importance of teamwork. In his book *Marriage: A Simple Guide to Success*, Brigman reminds couples that they are on the same team. "Many Depression-era families were torn apart by the financial stresses," Brigman asserts. "But some remained strong even when the going got tough. When husbands and wives work together, even

hardships can strengthen their relationship. Spend some time together every day. Be patient and support one another.”

After weeks of worrying and blaming herself, Michele was finally able to put her fear and resentment aside. She found particular comfort in the words Danny told her the day she lost her job: “We’ll survive. We always do.”

For 25 years, Dr. Susan Wolf has been telling her clients the same thing. Wolf is a licensed psychologist and has counseled many women regarding their relationship and career issues. “Life is temporary,” Wolf says. “Being laid off is one of those temporary things. Eventually you’ll find a job, and you’ll realize that you’ll be working for the rest of your life.”

And temporary it was. About two months after her lay off, Michele found a full-time job at a local printing supplies company. Her new schedule is even more demanding than her old one, and she misses the time she had with Danny when she was home. No longer is she able to greet her husband when he comes home, or have dinner ready on the table. However, the couple makes it a point to set aside some “alone time” every night – a time they use to communicate and to simply enjoy each other’s company. Both Michele and Danny have learned that no matter how hard times get, they will always have one thing: each other. “It’s not important to have all the money in the bank,” Danny says. “It’s the little things in life that matter, the quality time with one another.”

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Word Count of Sidebar: 320

Sidebar

Have you been laid off recently, or are you afraid of losing or your job? If the answer to either of these questions is “yes,” just remember you’re not alone. There are people who love you and will support you through your time of need. Losing your job is not a crisis; it’s an opportunity to wind down, put things in perspective, and recognize what’s most important in your life: your family. Here are some tips to help you make the best of your situation:

1. *Don’t panic.* Losing your job can spark a lot of anger and resentment. Instead of taking your frustration out on those around you, take a deep breath and remind yourself that things will get better.
2. *Don’t blame yourself.* A lot of women attribute their job loss to the notion that they were not good enough in some way or another. It’s not about how smart you are or how well-liked you are – it’s about money.
3. *Enjoy the little things.* Being home gives you the chance to do all those little things you didn’t have time for before – visiting a neighbor, watching your favorite soap, cooking a meal for your husband. It’s possible to enjoy yourself on a limited budget, and you’ll find that the little things in life are the most fulfilling anyway.
4. *Cherish the support of your loved ones.* Spend more time with your family and confide in them. It’s times like these that make you realize what a strong support system you have.
5. *Reassess your situation.* Step back and ask yourself some questions: Were you really happy when you were working? If you didn’t care for your job, you may be relieved to be out of that situation. Is there something else you’d rather be doing? Many women find that they are better suited for another line of work, while others are happy at home.