

Facing a layoff? Steps you can take to prepare, recover

By Holly Culhane, Contributing Columnist



Worldwide oil prices are falling and in an oil county like Kern, the impacts are painfully hitting home.

After enjoying a heady decade of climbing prices and booming domestic production, oil prices began to fall from a high of \$107 a barrel in June to \$80 in October, \$66 in November and \$53 in December. Prices now are bouncing below the \$50 mark.

A worldwide oversupply of oil and lower demand are blamed for this free-fall. Politics also play a part as OPEC nations refuse to cut back their supplies, some believe, in an effort to pressure U.S. producers and protect their markets.

Kern County, California's major oil producing area, is feeling the effects of lower oil prices. Supervisors were recently warned that Kern County could lose an estimated \$61 million in property tax revenue next fiscal year.

But the real consequence is the human toll it is taking. Thousands of oil workers are being laid off across the U.S. as big and small companies trim their workforces. Likely few neighborhoods in Bakersfield have been spared the heartbreak of a job layoff.

If you face a layoff at your workplace – whether it is tied to oil prices or other factors – there are steps you can take to help you prepare and recover.

Anticipate. If a layoff has not reached you, do not assume you will be spared. Be prepared. Establish or update your LinkedIn profile. Refresh your resume. Assemble a list of contacts. Be proactive.

Try to not panic. Remember that a layoff is not a firing. It generally is across the board and does not reflect on an individual's performance. Focus on getting a new job.

Inventory your skills. Understand the full range of your job skills and how they will apply to other jobs in your industry and other fields. Fine-tune skills that need polishing.

Research the job market. What economic sectors are hiring? For example, if layoffs are occurring in oil production, what about other energy sectors? Recently Gov. Brown announced he intends to increase to 50 percent from 33 percent the amount of energy California will be required to obtain from renewable resources, such as solar and wind. Are your skills needed to help produce this "green energy?" Healthcare is a booming field. Are your skills applicable to healthcare, administration or plant maintenance?

Network. Refresh and expand your contacts. Include resources in your industry and related fields. Make yourself available to people who have job openings or know of job openings. Let people know you are

looking for a job and how they can reach you. Connect with as many people as you can, and follow-up when they give you leads.

Search. Don't wait for your unemployment checks to roll in. Get out and look for a job right away. Your temporary full-time job now is to find a new job! Work a full eight-hour day. Take breaks, like you would at work, but keep at it. Persistence pays off!

Many firms, particularly the larger ones, offer "outplacement" services for their displaced workers. This helps with the hard transitions that accompany all layoffs. But workers who are not provided these services can seek help from government and private employment agencies, and human resources counselors. A number of advisory services for such things as resume preparation also can be found on the Internet.

Booms and busts are facts of life in the oil business. People in Kern County have experienced or witnessed the effects of earlier cycles. No doubt Kern County's resilient economy and tough, hardworking citizens will rebound from this latest downturn. Their work ethic is embodied in Albert Einstein: "In the middle of difficulty, lies opportunity."

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