

# I've just been sacked: What do I do now?

Losing your job can be a shock but it's not the end of the world, write **Amanda Horswill** and **Laura Stead**

THERE are so many ways to get fired.

Workers can leave for the day on Monday and turn up on Tuesday to be faced with closed doors. A single worker could be issued with marching orders, with claims of misconduct chasing them out the door. Workers could be asked to put up their hand for a voluntary golden handshake, or have their hand put up for them. "Early retirement" could be just that, or the only palatable choice to make.

Whatever way it happens, getting the sack is a body blow.

These days, unfortunately, it's not a rare torture reserved for the unlucky few. It's a shared pain affecting whole communities.

But what do you do when you get the heave-ho?

First up, determine why you are being let go. Then work out if you can — or want to — do anything about it legally. Consult your union, if you are a member. Go to a solicitor who specialises in workplace relations.

Then, call Centrelink or go online and register for help. Call 132 850 if you are over 21 and 132 490 if you are 21 or younger. A tip on their website recommends calling on Wednesdays and Thursdays when calls are usually fewer in number.

They may make an appointment for you to see someone at a Job Network or Centrelink office, and they should tell you what to take with you (such as bank details, birth certificate and work history).

Changes to the way help is doled out now mean that workers made redundant can access resume services, counselling, training and other job-hunting assistance. Take proof of termination of employment with you, if possible, in the form of an Employment Separation Certificate detailing

the nature of your termination and when you will stop working. Employers must provide you with one, by law. If you don't have that evidence, discuss your options with the Centrelink officer, or call. There is also a handy booklet available for download ([www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/publications/lw001.htm](http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/publications/lw001.htm)).

Unfortunately, there is no blanket rule about when financial assistance is paid — that is determined by officers according to government policy that measures past income, assets and other circumstances.

If your employer is offering any formal support services, such as counselling or career planning advice, take it.

From *Fired to Hired* author Dawn Richards says the emotional toll of being dismissed can be considerable.

"One of the most devastating things that can happen to you is losing your job," Richards says. "In just a few minutes, your life is changed dramatically. You don't just lose your job, you lose the essence of who you are, including your self-image, your weekly income, perhaps your company car and mobile phone, your credit rating, the way your family and friends regard you — everything that made up your personal identity when you arrived at work the day you were dismissed.

"It's a very confusing and frightening time.

"Generally speaking, the longer you've been with an organisation, the greater the loss you'll experience. If you're a mature-aged person (over 45) it's an even bigger blow.

"You've probably been with the same organisation for decades and you don't have a clue how or where to look for a job.

"One of the first things you need to

do after being dismissed is to sort out your finances.

"Contact Centrelink immediately to seek advice about your particular situation. There's a flyer full of practical tips put out by the Welfare Rights Centre Inc. called *I've lost my job, what do I do now?* ([www.wrcqld.org.au](http://www.wrcqld.org.au)).

"People go through the five stages of grief following job loss.

"It's normal to feel upset, betrayed, angry, shocked, frightened, anxious, numb and a host of other negative emotions. It takes time to work through these feelings and move on. Sometimes, it's helpful to see a counsellor.

"Research shows that the sooner you accept the loss of your job, the sooner you'll move on to a new one. This is easier for some than others.

"The most important thing to remember is that thousands of others have worked through this situation and gained new (and often better) jobs, and you can too."

Sarina Russo Job Access chief executive officer Kevin Ayre says developing a plan of action can help regain a sense of control.

"It's so important for job seekers to respond positively and take action to improve their employment prospects and maximise their competitiveness in the job market," he says.

"Jobseekers should consider further education and training to improve their skills and competencies to deal with this new employment paradigm.

"The economic downturn is affecting the employment opportunities across the demographic spectrum and its important to develop a return-to-work plan."

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