

A REFLECTION COMPANION

THE LAYOFF YOU DIDN'T CHOOSE

A companion for the days after the job you lost

50 Honest Reflections for the Job You Lost and the
Person You're Becoming

ROBERT NICHOLS

The Layoff You Didn't Choose: 50 Honest Reflections for the Job You Lost and the Person You're Becoming

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WHY I WROTE THIS BOOK

MY STORY

ROBERT NICHOLS

I know what it feels like to have a job disappear out from under you without warning. Years ago, work my family depended on ended abruptly. I had a wife, a daughter, rent, groceries, and no backup plan. There was no severance conversation that softened it, no tidy explanation that made the shock smaller. There was just the fact of it: the income was gone, and the plan I'd been building toward went with it.

I took day-labor work. I donated plasma for money. I studied internet marketing at night and built small websites nobody had asked for, because it was something to do with my hands and my fear at the same time. The first twenty-five cents I ever earned online mattered disproportionately, not because of the amount, but because it was proof of a path I could actually test. Those early, unglamorous experiments eventually grew into a digital-marketing career, and later, into the confidence to teach and present in rooms I once would have avoided entirely.

I also grew up moving constantly — Pennsylvania, California, Germany — while my father served in the Army. Later, I served too. Between the two, I learned something about how to function while the ground was still moving: not by pretending to feel calm, but by finding small, concrete things to do that were actually within my control.

None of what I lost was a gift I needed. The layoff didn't make sense in a way that resolved cleanly, and I don't think it has to, for you either. What actually helped, over time, wasn't finding the silver lining quickly. It was learning to separate what had happened from what remained available to me: a skill, a person willing to help, a small experiment, one next honest decision.

That pattern is what this book is built from. I didn't choose the layoff. I learned that losing a job is not the same as losing everything a job gave me.

USE ONE PAGE

How to Use This Book

You do not have to read this book in order. Use the finder on the next page and begin with the truth that matches today. Each truth is a two-page spread: read the reflection, then use the facing page if writing would help.

You may skip any prompt that feels too activating or simply wrong for today. For medical, legal, financial, safety-related, high-stakes, or irreversible decisions — including anything involving a severance agreement — slow down and seek qualified input. Use small experiments only for choices you can safely undo.

Date your first response. When you return, answer again: What changed? What remains true? What do I need now? The point is not to grade yourself. It is to make movement, limits, and continuing needs visible.

FIND YOUR ENTRY POINT
WHAT DOES TODAY FEEL LIKE?

You do not have to begin at Truth 1. Start where today's need is clearest.

Numb or in shock	TRUTHS 1, 2, 3
Blaming myself	TRUTHS 9, 37
Ashamed, or comparing myself to others	TRUTHS 22, 24, 25
Angry	TRUTHS 34, 35
Scared about money	TRUTHS 31, 32, 33, 40
Grieving more than I expected	TRUTHS 19, 36
Exhausted by explaining this	TRUTHS 7, 23
Unsure who I am without the job	TRUTHS 11, 12, 20, 41
Ready to start rebuilding	TRUTHS 43, 45, 46, 50

CHOOSE THE RESPONSE
THREE LANES FOR THE IN-BETWEEN

If basic functioning is strained, stabilize first. Otherwise sort the choice by its actual stakes.

1 EXPERIMENT

For a low-stakes, reversible choice, try one limited move that can produce useful information.

2 DELIBERATE

For a consequential choice that is not immediately urgent, name criteria, gather facts, consult affected people or relevant expertise, and set a decision date.

3 VERIFY / GET HELP

For safety, medical, legal, financial, irreversible, or real-deadline decisions — such as signing a severance agreement or accepting a new offer — verify the requirement and use an official source or qualified guidance.



PART I

The Break

A layoff arrives before the mind is ready to receive it. The room is still the same room. The calendar still says Tuesday. But something has already ended that the body has not caught up to yet. This part does not ask you to make sense of what happened. It stays exactly where you are: in the first hours, the first calls, the first night.

TRUTHS 1-10

TRUTH 1

The Meeting That Became a Layoff

01

"Some meetings are named accurately only in hindsight."

The invitation might have looked ordinary. A recurring sync moved fifteen minutes earlier. A new name added to the calendar you didn't recognize. A subject line that said "Quick Chat," or nothing at all. Nothing about the format warned you what the meeting actually was.

By the time you understood, you were already inside it. A manager reading from a document. A stranger from HR present to witness. Words arriving in a particular order — restructuring, position eliminated, effective today — designed less to inform you than to get through the room without incident. You may have heard every word and retained none of them. You may have asked a question and not remembered the answer. This is not a failure of attention. It is what a nervous system does when the ground changes faster than the mind can track it.

Some layoffs come with warning: a hiring freeze, a round of departures before yours, a feeling in the building that something was coming. Others arrive with no warning at all, on a day that looked exactly like every other day until it didn't. Either way, the meeting itself is often smaller and stranger than the moment deserves. Fifteen minutes. A script. A box for you to sign. Then you are back in your day, except your day no longer exists in the shape it did an hour ago.

It can help, later, to write down what you actually remember — not to build a case, not yet, but because shock has a way of erasing its own record. What was said. What wasn't. What you noticed about the room, the tone, the timing. You are not required to have understood it in real time. Understanding is allowed to arrive slowly, in pieces, over the following days, as the meeting replays itself and you catch details you missed the first time.

What matters right now is smaller than understanding. It is simply this: the meeting is over. Whatever comes next — the calls you'll make, the questions you'll have, the anger or relief or numbness that hasn't fully landed yet — none of it has to happen in the next five minutes. You do not owe anyone a composed reaction to news you just received. You are allowed to sit with it exactly as unprocessed as it currently is.

READ / NOTICE / RETURN

01

PAUSE + WRITE

NOTICE THIS

If your memory of the meeting feels partial or out of order, that is a normal effect of shock, not a sign you handled it wrong.

WRITE IT DOWN

What do you actually remember from the meeting — the words, the tone, the room? What don't you remember, and is that missing piece something you need back right now?

WHEN YOU RETURN

Has more of the meeting come back to you since you first wrote this? Does it still feel like the same event?

First read: _____ Returned on: _____

SKIP ANY PROMPT THAT DOES NOT FIT TODAY

TRUTH 2

Locked Out Before You've Said Goodbye

02

"Access can end before closure does."

The laptop may still be open on your desk when the access disappears. A login that no longer works. A Slack workspace that logs you out mid-scroll. An email account that stops receiving before you've had the chance to draft the message you meant to send — to a teammate, a client, a project you were still holding together in your head an hour ago.

This is one of the strange cruelties of how modern layoffs happen: the ending is administrative before it is emotional. Someone in IT flips a switch on a schedule that has nothing to do with whether you are ready. You may lose a decade of saved files, a folder of notes only you understood, a half-finished conversation with someone you actually liked working with — not because anyone meant to be unkind, but because offboarding runs on its own clock, and grief was never part of its design.

If this happened to you, it is fair to be angry about the abruptness even if you understand the reasons. You can know that companies limit access for legal, security, and continuity reasons, and still feel the loss of not getting to say what you wanted to say — to a mentor, a direct report, a coworker who became something closer to a friend. The lack of closure is a real loss, not a small one, even though it rarely shows up on anyone's list of what a layoff costs you.

If there is anything still recoverable — a personal photo on a work device, a contact you want to keep, a document you're legally entitled to — it is worth asking, plainly, whether you can retrieve it. Not everyone will say yes. But you are allowed to ask.

And for what isn't recoverable: the unsent message, the unfinished handoff, the goodbye you didn't get to give — you can still say it, just not through the same channel. A personal email. A LinkedIn message once you're ready. A note to yourself, if the person isn't someone you're in touch with anymore. Closure doesn't have to travel through the same door that closed on you.

READ / NOTICE / RETURN

02

PAUSE + WRITE

NOTICE THIS

The moment of losing access and the moment of feeling done are rarely the same moment — it's fair to still feel unfinished even after the door has technically closed.

WRITE IT DOWN

What is still unsaid or unfinished from your last role? Is there a way to say or finish any part of it now, even outside the original channel?

WHEN YOU RETURN

Has the unfinished piece found its way to some kind of closure — through a message sent, a conversation had, or simply time passing?

First read: _____ Returned on: _____

SKIP ANY PROMPT THAT DOES NOT FIT TODAY