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## Healing the Wounds

### Overcoming the Trauma of Layoffs and Revitalizing Downsized Organizations

#### THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

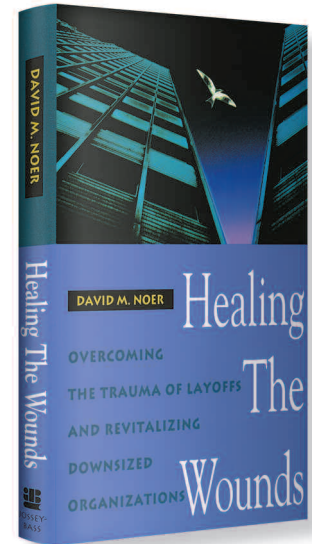
Layoffs make the business pages, even the front pages, of our newspapers nearly every day. Boeing, IBM, AT&T — massive downsizing continues to strike American business. What about those who are left behind? How can workers restore their energy, productivity and risk taking when their trust and loyalty have been stripped away? How can managers initiate healing and motivate employees burdened with twice their usual workload?

In this summary, training expert David M. Noer skillfully brings together the “hard” and “soft” sides of a critical corporate issue to provide practical and profound guidance to professionals in a variety of fields.

This summary provides an antidote to the widespread malaise on the American business scene left in the wake of massive layoffs. Drawing on case studies and original research, David M. Noer — a frequently quoted expert in major media such as *The Wall Street Journal* and *Fortune* — provides executives, human resource professionals, managers and consultants with an original model and clear guidelines for revitalizing downsized organizations.

#### IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How companies that go through layoffs to get lean and mean can end up sad and angry.
- How to meet the challenge of addressing one of the toughest management issues: downsizing.
- How executives and organizations can find real workable solutions to the problem of layoff survivor sickness.
- How to deal with the complex issues of anxiety, fear and sorrow.
- How to effectively downsize while forging productive relationships with surviving workers.



by David M. Noer

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# THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: HEALING THE WOUNDS

by David M. Noer

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*Healing the Wounds: Overcoming the Traumas of Layoffs and Revitalizing Downsized Organizations* by David Noer. Copyright © 1993 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Summarized by permission of the publisher, John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 248 pages, \$24.95, ISBN 1-55542-708-1. Summary copyright © 2008 by Soundview Executive Book Summaries, www.summary.com, 1-800-SUMMARY, 1-610-558-9495.

## PART ONE: THE SHATTERED COVENANT

### Forgotten Survivors

It begins with a deep sense of violation. It often ends with angry, sad and depressed employees, consumed with their attempt to hold on to jobs that have become devoid of joy, spontaneity and personal relevancy, and with the organization attempting to thrive in a competitive global environment with a risk-averse, depressed work force. This is no way to lead a life and no way to run an organization.

#### Layoff Survivor Sickness

*Layoff survivor sickness* is a generic term that describes a set of attitudes, feelings and perceptions that occur in employees who remain in organizational systems following involuntary employee reductions.

The root cause of layoff survivor sickness is a profound shift in the psychological employment contract that binds individual and organization. The symptoms of layoff survivor sickness are found in pockets in most organizations and are breaking out in epidemic proportions in many. The battle to ward off and eventually develop an immunity to these survivor symptoms must be waged simultaneously by individuals and organizations.

This battle is among the most important struggles that we and our organizations will ever face. Individuals must break the chains of their unhealthy, outdated organizational codependency and recapture their self-esteem; organizations must achieve their potential and thrive in the new world economy. For the organization, holding on to the familiar is not the answer. For the individual, holding on to the job is not always the most healthy option.

#### Lean and Mean Leads to Sad and Angry

Layoffs are intended to reduce costs and promote an efficient, lean and mean organization. However, what tends to result is a sad and angry organization, populated by depressed survivors. The basic bind is that the process of reducing staff to achieve increased efficiency and productivity often creates conditions that lead to the opposite result — an organization that is risk-averse and less productive. The key variable is the survivors' sense of personal violation. The greater their perception of violation, the greater their susceptibility to survivor sickness.

#### Denial

One symptom of layoff survivor sickness is a hierarchical denial pattern: The higher a person resides in an organization, the more he or she will be invested in denying the symptoms of the sickness. Understanding and dealing with survivor symptoms requires personal vulnerability and an emotional and spiritual knowledge of the symptoms.

Before individuals or organizations can formulate healing strategies, they need a deep literal and symbolic understanding of the pathology of layoff survivor sickness. ●

### Changing Organizations and the End of Job Security

We are in the midst of a fundamental paradigm shift. Both individuals attempting to shake the symptoms of layoff survivor sickness and regain meaning and relevance in their work and organizations struggling to compete in the new global economy need to understand the significance of this basic shift.

#### Paradigm Shifts

Although it is difficult to see change when we are in the middle of it, there are four organizational yardsticks we



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Published by Soundview Executive Book Summaries (ISSN 0747-2196), P.O. Box 1053, Concordville, PA 19331 USA, a division of Concentrated Knowledge Corp. Published monthly. Subscriptions: \$209 per year in the United States, Canada and Mexico, and \$295 to all other countries. Periodicals postage paid at Concordville, Pa., and additional offices.

**Postmaster:** Send address changes to Soundview, P.O. Box 1053, Concordville, PA 19331. Copyright © 2008 by Soundview Executive Book Summaries.

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can use to measure it. These yardsticks have an old worldview at one end and a new worldview at the other. The changes they measure occur in the assumptions organizations make about the purpose of employees, the long-term versus short-term time orientation of organizations and the optimum operational size of organizations.

Here are four clues of the paradigm shift:

- **From Assets to Costs: The New View of Employees.** Perhaps the clearest evidence of the paradigm shift is that organizations that used to perceive people as long-term assets to be nurtured and developed now see people as short-term costs to be reduced. This basic change represents a fundamental shift in the psychological covenant between the organization and the individual.

- **From Nurturing to Violence: The Symbolism of Layoff Language.** The symbolism of layoff language patterns provides powerful evidence of a paradigm shift. If leaders understand the language of violence literally, they can see that managers who are “taking out” or “terminating” their fellow employees see themselves, at some level, as doing severe harm to others.

Consequently these managers experience anger and survivor guilt.

- **From Long Term to Short Term: The Shrinking Planning Horizon.** Another harbinger of the new paradigm is the shrinking time frame that organizations apply to almost everything. Organizations are reducing cycle time, planning time, budgeting time, travel time, development time and significantly, employee tenure time.

- **From Synergistic to Reductionistic: Taking Apart Is Better Than Putting Together.** *Synergy* is an old-paradigm word. Once, organizations added components, built themselves up, developed people for the long term, and a form of magic happened: Two and two came out to more than four. No longer.

The new paradigm is *reductionistic*. The shift in preference is from large to small. In human resources terms, the shift is from long-term employee development to short-term employee fit.

### Layoff Survivor Sickness: The Legacy

The reality of the paradigm shift is becoming increasingly clear, and we can only live in one paradigm — we can't go back. What we can do, what we must do, if we are to revitalize our organizations, is to deal with layoff survivor sickness, the legacy of the demise of the old paradigm and the old employee contract.

Those occupying leadership roles are the key to the survival of organizations and the rekindling of the spirit and creativity of the work force. The new challenge to leaders is much more complex and stressful than operating within the predictability of the old paradigm. Both organizational leaders struggling to compete in a global marketplace and

individuals seeking relevance in a time of change must first learn to let go of the comfort of the predictable past. ●

## PART TWO: THE SURVIVOR EXPERIENCE

### The Survivor Syndrome Across Time

In the confusion of the post-layoff environment, it is easy for managers to underestimate the severity of survivor symptoms, both in those they manage and in themselves. However, layoff survivors suffer long-lasting symptoms that are in many ways similar to the symptoms of other survivors. An awareness of these similarities not only defines the seriousness of layoff survivor sickness but also stimulates the emotional release and grieving that must take place before organizations and survivors can move forward. A deeper understanding of universal survivor symptoms can unblock organizational denial.

#### Survivor Linkages

All those involved in layoffs should broaden their cognitive and emotional (head and heart) understanding of the linkages among survivors of trauma. This broad understanding is necessary if managers in particular are to heal themselves and then help others. There are three primary linkages:

- Similar symptoms.
- A common sense of violation and preoccupation with death imagery.
- Blurred distinctions between those who do and those who do not survive, and a shared sense of victimization among victims and victimizers.

#### Robert Lifton

An illuminating way of viewing the universality of survivorship is through the symbolic lenses of psychiatry. Robert Lifton's psychological analysis of Hiroshima atomic bomb survivors created a model that can be applied to all survivor situations. The work of other experts gives evidence that a form of survivor guilt exists in layoff situations even though no literal deaths are involved.

Lifton's cure for survivor sickness involves a process of structuring a new relationship with the world and coming to terms with the permanence of loss. Similarly, the cure for layoff survivor sickness requires that survivors accept the “new reality” and let go of the old paradigm. The cure demands that survivors muster up the courage to break organizational codependency and live organizational life as adventurers, not victims. ●

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### Similarity in Symptoms

After the space shuttle Challenger disaster, the thousands of people who had worked in the shuttle program felt like disaster survivors. Descriptions of the symptoms experienced by these survivors and by layoff survivors at Occidental Petroleum provide an example of survivor symptom similarity.

Shortly after the disaster, observers said that the shuttle survivors experienced “guilt, anxiety and fear,” with the full intensity of these feelings yet to be dealt with because of “denial.” Very similar words were used by human resource consultant Marshall Stelifox when he described the symptoms of “anxiety, distrust, fear and insecurity” among survivors at Occidental Petroleum.

### Layoff Survivor Stories

A 1987 field study allows readers to experience the turmoil and anger of survivors. The study took place in a large multinational firm headquartered on the East Coast. At the time of the initial study, the organization was experiencing financial problems and implementing a downsizing that called for significant across-the-board layoffs.

The initial study consisted of two samples: structured interviews of small groups of layoff survivors and individual interviews with human resource professionals involved in layoff administration.

### Unexpected Findings

Most of the study findings were consistent with expectations. According to data from other survivor situations and previous research on layoff survivors, intense fear, anger, insecurity, depression and guilt seem to be the core survivor feelings. The perceptions of the layoff survivors in the study were consistent with many of these core feelings.

There were, however, some unexpected results:

- **Few expressions of survivor guilt.** Guilt was not identified as a major theme. Since other researchers believe that feelings of guilt are central to survivorship, the absence of these feelings in the study is notable. One explanation could be that guilt is a difficult human emotion for an individual to own and disclose in a group situation.

- **Expressions of optimism.** Although they also had feelings of uncertainty, stress and reduced motivation, some managers and executives expressed feelings of optimism, perceptions that a tough but needed job had been done and that the organization was back on track toward profitability.

- **Emergence of a layoff-survivor blaming phenomenon.** All groups blamed others. Top executives blamed other executives or the company president.

These feelings were intense across all groups.

- **Thirst for information.** Better, clearer and more consistent information during layoffs was a survivor’s key recommendation.

- **Sense of change.** Survivors in all groups indicated that the layoffs had triggered changes in their relationship to the organization.

These survivors are mirrors of other layoff survivors. Learning the true extent of layoff survivors’ hurt is important for anyone attempting self-transformation or organizational transformation and empowerment. ●

### The Effects of Long-Term Survivor Sickness

Time, it would appear, does not heal all wounds. In order to assess the impact of time on layoff survivor symptoms, a second study took place at the same organization five years after the initial effort. This is one of the few attempts to assess the continuity of layoff survivor symptoms over time, and the results are of interest to any individual or organization attempting to escape the debilitating effects of layoff survivor sickness.

### Time Does Not Heal All Wounds

One category of employee comments was stress, fatigue, extra workload, decreased motivation, sadness and depression. In this category, one administrative employee said, “I didn’t realize that I was probably suffering from some form of depression, but it was going on, and on, and on. I mean day after day after day, feeling the same way.”

In the insecurity, anxiety and fear category, a professional/ technical employee said, “Five years ago, you felt more secure. You had a future with the company. At the present time, you don’t know whether you are going to be sold out, you are going to be downsized. That’s a big difference.”

In the loyalty to job (not company), nonreciprocal loyalty and self-reliance category, one professional/technical employee commented, “At one time, we kind of felt the company was responsible for your job security and that they would look after you, but I think we all know today that has shifted.”

Other categories of comments from employees included a sense of unfairness and anger over top management pay and severance, resignation and numbness, lack of management communication, helpful and communicative managers, honest communication, short-term plans and strategy, layoff process problems, and resentment over being made to feel guilty.

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## More Tired and Depressed

Layoff survivor symptoms have persevered and evolved over time within the organization. Survivors seem more tired and depressed. They seem to have been ground down by five years of job insecurity and flux. Although they have reduced their reliance on the organization to take care of them and seemed resigned to non-reciprocated loyalty, they are still struggling to understand and accommodate permanent job insecurity.

The data from this study and other survivor studies show that survivor symptoms do not automatically go away on their own. They remain, evolve and often intensify over time. ●

## PART THREE: INTERVENTIONS FOR HEALTHY SURVIVAL

### A Four-Level Process for Handling Layoffs and Their Effects

Layoff survivor sickness is serious. It is complex and does not lend itself to a simple solution. It contains conflicts of values centered on organizational codependency and self-empowerment. To be cured of it, people must let go of the familiar old and venture into the untested new. Healing layoff survivor sickness is, in the final analysis, an individual effort, requiring great personal courage. Creating organizational systems that will prevent the reoccurrence of this sickness ought to be one of the most fundamental priorities of organizational leaders.

Only compelling interventions can deal with the pathology of layoff survivor sickness. These *interventions* will be powerful acts, attention-grabbing and stimulating forces that compel survivors to choose personal and organizational change.

#### The Four-Level Intervention Model

Four levels of intervention are needed to deal with layoff survivor sickness:

1. *Process interventions.* Level 1 interventions deal with the process, the way layoffs take place from the survivors' perspective. These interventions do not provide a cure for survivor sickness but keep survivors from sinking further into survivor symptoms.

2. *Grieving interventions.* Level 2 interventions help survivors grieve. These interventions deal with repressed feelings and emotions and provide the opportunity for a catharsis that releases the energy that has been invested in emotional repression.

3. *Interventions that break the chain of organizational codependency.* Level 3 interventions help survivors recapture from

the organization their sense of control and self-esteem.

4. *Systems interventions.* Level 4 interventions create the structural systems and processes that immunize people against survivor sickness.

Although the four-level pyramid is a stage model (Level 1 interventions proceed to Level 2 and so on) and is intended to convey the increasing depth and breadth of each successive intervention, the real world is much more dynamic than any model. The four-level model generally holds true: Process interventions are less complex and deep than those that facilitate grieving; interventions to break organizational codependency are yet deeper and broader than the first two; while interventions that change organizational systems from those that reinforce the old paradigm to those that encourage the new are the most difficult of all. ●

### Level One: Manage the Layoff Process

Level 1 interventions affect the layoff processes and their impact on survivors. Although Level 1 interventions occur at the tip of the layoff iceberg, they are tactically important. They keep survivors from sinking too deeply into the quagmire of depression and guilt, keeping these survivors afloat until other, more permanent interventions can be applied to pull them out.

Layoff survivors have an unquenchable thirst for information before, during and after reductions. It is impossible for managers to overcommunicate during layoffs. Layoff planners should *communicate everything that is going on*. Employees are desperately seeking assurance and striving for control over a frightening environment.

#### Control Traps

Despite the overwhelming evidence that there is a data feeding frenzy at all levels, it is often difficult for managers to stimulate and maintain the free flow of information. Instead, during layoffs, managers often set for themselves *control traps*, barriers that block needed self-insight and authentic communication.

All of us — top executives, middle managers and individual contributors — erect traps to control and manage the information and emotions that should be spontaneous and free-flowing. In order to be relevant to ourselves and our fellow survivors, we need to go against the grain and resist our tendencies to control and deny. We need the courage to engage in straight talk with ourselves and others.

Dealing with survivors' perceptions of fairness, equity and caretaking and permitting prior notification and participation in decision making are other important Level 1 interventions.

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Process interventions are tactical. Though important, they are hygiene factors that serve only to stop the bleeding; they do not promote healing. Healing itself begins with emotional release, or grieving. ●

### Level Two: Facilitate the Necessary Grieving

Level 2 interventions unblock repressed feelings. Even in the best-handled layoffs, survivors feel violated. They must release their feelings before they can go on. Since organizations often have strong norms against employees' even admitting the presence of survivor emotions, let alone sharing and dealing with them, second-level interventions frequently must tease out repressed emotions. While some survivors avail themselves of private therapy and others have support systems that allow them to sort out their feelings, the vast majority of layoff survivors repress their feelings and have no personal or organizationally sanctioned outlet for anger and fear.

#### Consider Starting With Outsiders

The bad news is that repressed anger and other emotions are so widespread. The good news is that the intervention process is not difficult to start, and once it is started, the feelings do come out. Initially, the organization may have to use outsiders to start the process. In the long term, management should integrate a process for facilitating survivor grieving into the organizational system — experts leave, reductions continue. Although individual counseling and therapy are useful, group work is the most effective and efficient method of bringing survivor emotions to the surface.

Today, most layoff survivors are suppressing strong, toxic and debilitating survivor emotions. Level 2 interventions help survivors express these feelings and get them out on the table so they can be dealt with. Emotional release and the necessary grieving over the layoffs and a lost way of life are prerequisites to healing. Facilitating the release and the grieving is a key management role.

#### First Help Yourself

In order to help others, organizational leaders must first help themselves. They must confront their own survivor feelings and get past their natural repression and shame. They must discover that it is OK to feel bad, that survivor feelings are a natural consequence of old-paradigm conditioning carried over to the new reality. But it is not right for anyone to avoid dealing with survivor sickness. Repression of survivor symptoms is hazardous to individual and organizational health.

Dealing with repressed survivor feelings and facilitating grieving is not the end of the intervention process. But

the catharsis that occurs during Level 2 interventions is a milestone along the road that will lead to individuals' breaking organizational codependency and becoming self-empowered. ●

### Level Three: Break the Codependency Chain and Empower People

The purpose of third-level interventions represents a basic shift in focus from earlier interventions. Levels 1 and 2 react to existing layoff survivor symptoms. Level 3 offers the possibility of preventing the sickness in the first place.

Level 3 interventions are both more complex and more hopeful than Levels 1 and 2. They are complex because, in the final analysis, they are played out within each person's human spirit. They are optimistic because they have the potential to help people move from being victims to being adventurers in control of their own identity, happiness and creative powers.

The field of codependency research and treatment offers both a language and a frame of reference that can help managers and employees understand how to bring about this optimistic transformation.

#### Organizational Codependency

Third-level interventions help individuals break organizational codependency and lead a self-empowered life. When individuals are self-empowered and have personal control of their self-esteem and sense of relevance, they are immune to layoff survivor sickness.

Codependent behavior is ancient, but the label and the formal concept date only from 1979. The initial, relatively simple idea was that people who deny their feelings, alter their identity and invest a great amount of energy in the attempt to control an alcoholic share the alcoholic's addiction; they are codependent with the alcoholic.

The idea has now been expanded to cover many other forms of addiction, and codependency is considered by some to be an underlying, primary disease in itself. Just as a person can exist in a codependent state with another person in relation to an addiction, a person can also be codependent with an organizational system. People who are organizationally codependent have enabled the system to control their sense of worth and self-esteem at the same time that they invest tremendous energy attempting to control the system.

#### Vibrant, Open and Productive Organizations

Relationships that are free of unhealthy control and dependency are fun, spontaneous and creative. The same is true of organizations. Organizations that are free of codependency are vibrant, open and productive. They

### A Symptom of Codependency

A primary symptom of codependency is that the codependent's sense of value and identity is based on pleasing, and often controlling, not himself or herself but someone or something else. Codependents make themselves into permanent victims. People suffering from layoff survivor sickness are similar full-time victims.

are filled with employees who are invested in good work and managers who are competent in helping skills.

Although they, too, may have layoffs, their survivors are largely immune to survivor sickness because the survivors (and those laid off) do not index their self-esteem and sense of personal worth to the organization but rather to their own good work.

### Breaking Codependent Relationships

Breaking any codependent relationship is a struggle requiring a personal act of courage. To break the organizational codependency chain, individuals must maintain internal control, keep their personal power and love themselves without making this love conditional on organizational approval. They must maintain their authenticity without obsessively and schizophrenically attempting to both please and control the system. The organizational goal is empowered employees working with minimal control.

Several common codependency treatment strategies can be effectively translated into Level 3 survivor intentions. Those strategies are detachment, letting go and connecting with a core purpose.

We must have the courage to engage in detachment, to stop defining ourselves in relation to our business organizations and to resist the simplicity of putting a taproot into organizational soil. We need to let go, to stop controlling and manipulating the system. Above all, we need to connect with something bigger than ourselves, with a personal core purpose. The result will be a rebirth of spirit, self-control and a work relationship centered on good work as opposed to manipulation and control. ●

### Level Four: Build a New Employment Relationship

Level 4 interventions create systems and processes that structurally mitigate layoff survivor sickness. These interventions grow out of the new psychological employment contract.

The old psychological contract was forged in the post-World War II culture, where big was better, relationships were long term and the United States enjoyed a

historically derived competitive advantage. Today, many of the old contract's assumptions and strategies are played out against far different realities. The resulting mismatch leads to conditions that foster layoff survivor sickness.

The shift from the old to the new contract affects all organizational members. No one is to blame for the shift, which is complex and requires both organizational and individual accommodation.

### From an Implicit Career Covenant to an Explicit Job Contract

What is beginning to emerge now is a shorter-term and more specific employment contract. The relationship is still win-win, but it is more equal. The employee does not blindly trust the organization with his or her career. The organization does not assume an unassumable burden. The common ground, the meeting point, is not the relationship, but the explicit task.

### Elements of Explicit Contractual Relationships

One effective employee-contracting model contains the seven elements that organizations should include in contracts with employees:

- **Task outcomes.** This is a clear, unambiguous statement of the work to be done, along with task benchmarks and key indicators.
- **Agreement duration.** This is the agreed-upon time for the task.
- **Contingency plans.** These are the "what ifs." What if unanticipated changes take place at either the organization or individual level? Contingency plans often lead to the termination provisions.
- **Compensation agreement.** This spells out how the person is to be compensated for his or her work.
- **Development agreement.** The contract spells out the effort the organization will make to develop the employee's skills for the current task or new skills for jobs inside or outside the organization.
- **Termination provisions.** These provisions specify what happens when the contract ends and there is no other work in the organization. It covers what financial and other help will be provided.
- **Renewal options.** These options describe the results that must happen, for both the employee and the organization, before the contract can be renewed.

Level 4 interventions are the supporting and complementary systems changes that will promote the climate that invites individual empowerment and autonomy. These new-paradigm systems changes can foster the individual acts of courage necessary to break organizational codependency.

Those who manage and lead organizations must make the same accommodations to the new reality as those in

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nonmanagement roles. In addition, top managers have the challenge of keeping the system together during a time of fundamental change. They need the skills, courage and survival sense to take whatever risks are necessary to align organizational systems with the new reality and wrest control away from a paradigm in its death throes. ●

### PART FOUR: THE GREAT WAKE-UP CALL

## Leading the New Organization

In order to create and sustain organizations that have structural immunity to layoff survivor sickness, leaders must guide these organizations through the messy reality of a paradigm shift. This requires a combination of personal growth and risk taking. Being responsible for major change while experiencing it is not an assignment that many people can take calmly. It is an emotional challenge as well as a leadership challenge.

### Culture Busting

Letting go of the old employment contract is not easy. Those who occupy meaning-making roles in the midst of a paradigm shift enter into an adventure in confusion, ambiguity and risk. Although it is sometimes terrifying, it is also sometimes exhilarating, and it is always crucial to the survival of the organization.

For many reasons, line managers find themselves face to face with the paradoxes of the new employment contract with little support. One helpful way for them to visualize their meaning-making role is that it facilitates movement from the comfortable old to the paradoxical and relevant new. This movement can be broken down into six specific shifts that the manager needs to bring about:

- From motivational strategies that promote dependence to strategies that promote independence.
- From the yearning for belonging to the necessity for autonomy.
- From the organization as an employee's primary social system to employment as an economic relationship.
  - From the leader as a savior to the leader as helper.
  - From the desire for permanence to the reality of transience.
  - From the leader as a purveyor of objective reality to the leader as a maker of meaning.

### Meaning-Making Leaders

Leaders must make meaning in a time of profound change. They must stimulate the necessary culture busting. They must master new or neglected competencies such as transition facilitation, visioning, value congruence, empowerment, self-understanding and process wisdom. Leaders do not acquire these relevant skills in traditional management development programs or busi-

ness schools; yet these skills are the most important capabilities leaders bring to the new paradigm.

No one has yet designed a core curriculum to teach leaders the functional skills necessary to manage a complex business and, in addition, teach leaders to be authentic, congruent, self-aware, process-wise, other-centered and facilitative in the midst of major cultural change. As a precondition to acquiring these needed relevancy skills, leaders must have a strongly developed set of democratic values and possess the courage to understand their own needs and agendas. The arenas in which these skills are cultivated include intrapersonal understanding (self-awareness); interpersonal competence (helping and empathy); and a continuous self-improvement (honing one's own mind and feelings as the primary instruments of leadership). ●

## Life After Downsizing: Revitalizing

The shock of violated dependency is a clear and compelling wake-up call, an alarm that, if heeded, could do more to stimulate a truly empowered and autonomous work force than all the theories, false starts and hollow rhetoric of the past.

The gift to us of the wake-up call is that it helps us frame our choices. Few of us will have had the opportunity to wrest our autonomy from our organizational affiliation during the height of the old paradigm; we were too much in the paradigm to see it. Now, many layoff survivors have the opportunity to make a real choice, and that may be a once-in-a-lifetime gift. Breaking organizational codependency and taking responsibility for our own work is our ultimate existential challenge.

It is a tenet of existential philosophy that as we move away from an artificial dependence we are moving toward our essential nature, which is freedom. Accepting this natural state of freedom after years of dependence is not easy.

### Make a Choice

Nevertheless, making the choice to immunize ourselves to layoff survivor sickness by breaking organizational codependency is an affirming act — something we do, not something we abstract. We have the opportunity to make a choice.

If we claim our independence and shed the manipulation and control of organizational codependency, we embark upon an existential voyage of discovery. We will never reach the end of this voyage; it is another tenet of existential philosophy that we are always in the process of becoming, never being. But what a voyage it is, filled with self-esteem, relevance and pride of contribution fueled by good work and unmarred by manipulation or futile attempts to control the uncontrollable! ●