

local report/revival

While job losses are an unfortunate global phenomenon, here in the UAE when people lose their jobs, they also risk losing their visa, forcing them to leave the country within 30 days of visa cancellation. To help cope with redundancy, Dr Raymond Hamden, Clinical and Forensic Psychologist at Dubai's Human Relations Institute, says that a job loss is a good time to re-evaluate your values and let go of some cherished but inappropriate beliefs and expectations. "For example, a job for life, two cars, and a foreign holiday," he says, by way of highlighting notions that are luxuries, not necessities. "Utilise the next few months to improve the skills you will need through study, training, voluntary work, hobbies and leisure," he says.

For most, job loss is completely unexpected and can be shocking. This was the case for Kristy Rogers from Dubai. She was nearly nine months pregnant when she lost her job as presenter and producer of a children's show on a local television network, where she had worked for three years. "Our salaries were being delayed and then my assistant and best friend lost her job, along with others in the company," she says. Still, even then, Kristy was optimistic. "However, a week later I was handed the dreaded envelope," she says, adding, "But now I'm the proud mum of a beautiful baby boy and I love being home with him." Recalling how she turned down job opportunities offered to her in the past because of company loyalty, she admits, "I have learnt that sometimes in business you need to put yourself first."

LOSS OF RELATIONSHIP

You know how it goes: you meet the man of your dreams, spend a blissful courtship together, don the white dress and prepare for your happy ever after. But increasingly, it doesn't work out that way and once happy couples are left to pick up the pieces as shocked, lonely singletons. Not only does divorce involve loss, but it also involves change. Lidia Marengo learned this first-hand when her marriage crumbled after just eight months. The 36-year-old freelance marketing consultant married a divorced, father of two in her native South Africa. Emotionally and mentally prepared to share her new husband with children that weren't her own, she was shocked to

discover the steadfast commitment her husband maintained with his ex-wife once they'd waltzed down the aisle. "During our six-month long courtship, his ex-wife was hardly in the picture and in fact, there weren't many issues before we got married. Once we got married, it seemed she was constantly in contact, asking for financial assistance," she says, though she wholeheartedly agreed and respected his commitment to his children. Still, Lidia says that he struggled to put boundaries up and in retrospect should not have gotten married. "It was almost like he was married to two women at once. I felt sidelined, with no real identity and a constant struggle to have a relationship of our own," says Lidia. It was a factor she couldn't contend with and so she walked away from her marriage to preserve her state of mind, self-worth and self-esteem. "I took a giant leap and joined not only a new job, but a new country in Dubai," she says, understanding within just the first few weeks of marriage that he wasn't the same man he had been during their courtship. To cope with the inevitable distress that divorce brings, Lidia took sensible steps to ensure her own recovery. "I had the privilege of receiving the spiritual and emotional support of a much older and wiser woman who counselled me throughout."

Rawan Albina, a Dubai-based life and wellness coach, reminds us that while you can attempt to numb the pain of loss through distractions, eventually you'll have to deal with the pain and express your grief fully. "Learn more about what you are going through by reading and educating yourself; find out more about which strategies would work best for you," she says. "If you have strong spiritual beliefs, you also might find comfort in prayer and surrendering your grief to a higher power." Again, as with all types of loss, time heals. "A grieving heart needs time to heal but eventually you will find joy again."

Despite the sadness and stress of a divorce, there is an opportunity to learn from the experience and grow into a stronger, wiser person. This was how San Qureshi, a 27-year-old ex-banker from Sharjah, felt after she divorced her husband within two years of marriage. "A big problem we had was my in-laws moving to Sharjah and into our family home without prior communication from my husband," says Sana, explaining that this lack of

communication was also responsible for a whole host of other spiralling issues. "My mother was my main support system, but I began putting in longer hours at work. I also had a strong network of buddies," she admits. Still, while she feels she has grown emotionally as a result of the experience, Sana says there is no button to press to erase our unpleasant memories. "No woman intends to break her marriage for silly reasons, but it just happened like that."

According to *The National* newspaper, the most recent figures for divorce in the UAE show that a whopping 46 per cent of marriages fail, the highest rate in the GCC. Still, there are coping mechanisms to help.

Mozghan Haghi, a marriage and family therapist in Dubai's Synergy Integrated Medical Centre, stresses that it's important not to compare your scenario with others. "Everyone is different and gets separated due to a set of different reasons," she says. Try spending time with people who support, value and energise you. "Give yourself permission to function at a less than optimal level for a period of time," she suggests, adding, "Limit questions that begin with 'why.' You will gradually find your answers over time through the healing process," she says.

LOSS OF RESPECT

It's the age-old adage that in order to respect anyone else, you must first respect yourself. So what happens when that self-respect is gone? For any number of reasons, women can, and often do, lose their self-respect.

This was a cruel reality for Sue Smith*, a 46-year-old from Dubai, who was in junior high school when her stepfather sexually abused her. "Right after it happened, I felt zoned out. I completely lost my self-respect," she says, remembering looking out of her bedroom window and wondering if there was anyone out there that could save her from what she was feeling. Seeping into all aspects of Sue's life, the abuse especially affected her relationships with members of the opposite sex. "I developed a much skewed view of the opposite sex and did not trust them," she admits. While going through two years of intermittent therapy, Sue continuously blamed herself for the abuse, which constantly hammered down on her already damaged self-respect. "I always felt like it

IMAGE: SHARHEAST/ISTOCK



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must have been my fault it all happened until one day, in an effort to heal myself, I read the book *The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem*, by Nathaniel Branden," she says. It literally changed her life. "It was a pivotal moment for me. It finally clicked that at the time the abuse happened, in order to survive it in my child's mind frame of reference, I had to keep this a secret, since it was better than potentially causing our family to break up." Since then, Sue has regained her self-

respect. "Also, thanks to the love of a good man, my faith in humanity is restored." The key to regaining lost self-respect and cope with this kind of trauma, stresses Priya Sridharan, an organisational psychologist at the Dubai Herbal and Treatment Centre, is to seek the right kind of professional help. "The right therapist can really help the individual walk through their emotions. More importantly, it helps in coming to terms with the episode," she

says. Professional help can also help the individual realise that it was not their fault and that there is no reason to have lost any sense of respect for themselves. "It is paramount to deal with the psychological and emotional aspects to the situation since many of these individuals otherwise may continue to feel worthless and lack self-respect if not treated," Priya says, suggesting that talking about the incident and acknowledging that it happened is