

## COACHING THE 'SURVIVORS' AN IMPORTANT ASPECT OF RESTRUCTURATION

### Layoff can be traumatizing

When a substantial part of an organizational unit or the whole organization is affected by a layoff due to the economic need for restructuring this will have a strong impact. Not only are the collaborators directly affected by a separation shocked but also the staff and managers remaining with the organization. These collaborators we call the 'survivors' of a restructuring. Finding a socially responsible way of letting collaborators go (e.g. by offering outplacement) is one important way for the leaders of the organization to show their concern for the "people dimension". But for some 'survivors' the situation might require more personal and psychological support.

### What are the signs of a traumatization

The remaining employees of the organization often show the following signs of their traumatization by the painful situation with profound effects on their behavior, performance and productivity:

- an increase in subjectively perceived stress
- increased mental stress in professional - and personal - domains
- conflicts and downtime occur more often
- disturbances of the workflow happen
- the motivation and productivity of the remaining employees decreases
- the loyalty and confidence in the company is questioned
- high performers and top talent voluntarily leave the field and
- ultimately, service and quality deteriorate as a result of this functional chain, which ends in a negative perception by the clients.

The psychological background of these reactions is called the "survivor syndrome" by labor psychology. It captures the emotional state of the remaining staff and defines it in its different phases.

### The phases of the 'survivor syndrome'

When a person is affected by the "Survivor Syndrome" in the classical form, her subjective perception goes through four distinct phases:

1. Relief ("Thank God - not me.")
2. Guilt ("Did I really deserve to keep my job?")
3. Envy ("With this compensation I would also really like to go.")
4. Resentment and rancor ("Now, with the same wage I also have to do the work of the laid-off colleagues - the department will go 'down the drain' anyhow.")

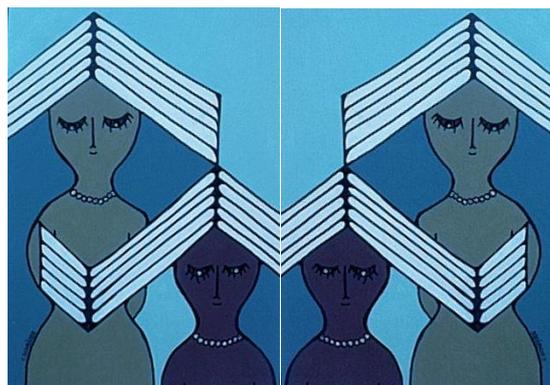


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**COACHING THE 'SURVIVORS'**  
An important aspect of restructuration

The October ACF Europe Newsletter will feature an article by Marc Saunder (Syntec Conseil en Evolution Professionnelle - French ACF Chapter - and Board Member of ACF Europe)

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## What can 'survivor coaching' do?

In this demanding context the objectives of the coaching provided for the traumatized remaining employees are:

- to reflect stress factors perceived by the affected employee in their various facets
- to support the person in its psychological coping with the emotions and moods described and thus
- to stabilize the individual state of mind and mental attitude of the person and
- to (re)gain commitment and proactive participation in the change process.

In this process, the affected employee will adapt psychologically in a positive way to the new situation in the organization and is supported in his/her individual potential for achievement and commitment to the organization in the changed conditions.

## Form and contents of the 'survivor coaching'

The target group of the survivor coaching are employees who have problems with the situation that colleagues have left the company and need a neutral person, who gives them psychological support and helps to adjust to the new situation.

The program normally is individually designed based on the personal characteristics of the coachee and takes into consideration the respective position in the company, family situation, age and motivation. Special attention is naturally laid on the psychological condition of the coachee.

The coaching is designed according to a methodological approach (e.g. the GROW coaching model of Whitmore).

According to our experience the specific coaching issues in the context of 'survivor coaching' depend on which phase of the 'survivor syndrome' the coachee asking for psychological support is actually living through. In general the 'survivor coaching' usually touches the following topics:

- **Goals and Values:**  
What is really important to me? What are my goals? What do I want to achieve in the current new phase of the company? How do I motivate myself in the change phase of the company?
- **Perspectives and Opportunities:**  
Which path will take me further? What is feasible? Where are opportunities in the new situation in the company? Where do I see my future in the company? How do I design my future in the company proactively?
- **Barriers:**  
What stops me? How do I get to a decision? How can I manage change?

Essentially, it is always a question of perspective and thus the question as to the own goals in the situation of the organizational change process. And it comes to the question of how I manage the necessary change, the stabilization of my personality and the continuation of my activities and my contribution to the company's success.

The survivor coaching program should be planned early and implemented at the same time as an outplacement program. It can be an important part of a change process and should be part of the communication plan as an element to maintain performance levels and to strengthen the organizational culture.

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### ACF Europe Industry Survey 2013

Thank you for  
participating in the  
**ACF Europe Industry Survey  
2013**

The findings will be  
published on our  
website in October

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### ACF Europe Conference 15 + 16 May 2014

#### ACF EUROPE CONFERENCE

In 2014, an ACF Europe  
conference will be  
organised in Paris from  
Thursday night 15 May to  
Friday afternoon 16 May.

Please put these dates in  
your diary. As soon as we  
have more details we will  
inform our members.

Please let us know if you  
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like to discuss during the  
conference.



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