



Career woes can drive loving couples apart.

You vowed to stick together "in sickness and in health," but how about when one of you gets the corporate ax?

Money woes and layoffs bring out the worst in us and in our relationships, according to Dr. Henry Paul, MD, a Manhattan-based psychiatrist and author. "Our net worth is directly tied to our self worth. As it drops, people get humiliated by having to ask others for money or to receive public assistance. Self loathing increases and this hate is often taken out on a spouse or those closest to us," he says.

Put Your Best Foot Forward

This anger must be controlled, or it will hamper your efforts to re-enter the job market. "If you're depressed, you're not going to interview well. It's likely that you'll be defensive and complain. Anger will show all over your face," says Lily Laub, vice president of Career Blazers, a staffing solutions provider for the northeastern United States. "Jobseekers have to force themselves to portray themselves in a positive, strong light to interviewers. People want people who make other people feel comfortable. Someone who rolls with the punches and who can get through difficult times," she says.

Unlike a year ago, when you may have been competing with four or five people for the same job, now that number is more like 20, according to Laub. "Focus on what will make you shine," she advises.

Two Minus One Equals Stress

Since the majority of American households depend on two incomes today, couples should plan for unexpected financial emergencies.

"Unfortunately, too many couples don't address money issues before they marry," says Anthony Rabasca, a marriage/family therapist and president of the New York Association for Marriage and Family Therapy. Lately, he's seen an influx of couples in the 25-35 age bracket who had done well as a dual-career pair, but who now find that they can't support their families at the level they could 18 months ago.

"Regrettably, too many couples try to maintain a level of providing for their children which is totally inappropriate. Even in hard economic times, they continue to say yes when they should say no. It sends a bad message to children about their relationship with money," said Mr. Rabasca.

When finances are a root cause of a depressed marriage or relationship, common signs include mounting debt, depression, or one partner becoming self-absorbed, according to Rabasca. And if one person loses their job, and yet the mate continues to excel, competition and resentment often set in. "Men are most vulnerable when they're unemployed. Issues of emotional weakness are highlighted and can lead to a power struggle," he adds.

Two Plus One Equals Help

Fortunately, for couples willing to acknowledge the existence of a problem, there can be a silver lining. "I'd recommend seeking professional help... a third party who can help you sort out what's really important," says Rabasca. Folks in dire financial straights should see a financial counselor in conjunction to assist with credit and debt difficulties, he advises.

If joblessness is a factor, remember, "There is a grieving process, a sense of loss one experiences when losing a job which needs to be validated by your partner. It's an opportunity for this person to be there for you when you're struggling with a difficult situation," says Rabasca. Unemployment is a temporary circumstance, Dr. Paul agrees. "Your spouse or partner can help by organizing an employment search and making contacts for you, so that you don't feel alone," he said. And when cutbacks on expenses become necessary, "Partners need to be as democratic as possible. The basic bills have to be met, but compromises must be made when it comes to discretionary spending."

Erika Welz Prafder is the president of [Real World Careers](#), assisting college students and graduates in their hunt for quality employment. She has also written a weekly career column for The New York Post.