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**The Brazen Careerist**By [Penelope Trunk](#) • Bankrate.com**Waiting for the layoff announcement**

My husband is probably about to be laid off. It's a touchy topic, though, and he is not very chatty about it, so I am left to guess. What he has told me is that that his company is out of money, but the CEO thinks she might be able to drum up more funds before the coffers run dry. May 31 is the big day.

He works at a nonprofit that receives money from the government to study prison reform. The more I hear that state governments are running dangerously high budget deficits, the more I think layoffs are certain.

But it's too depressing for the CEO to say, "There's nothing to do this month so everyone bring a book to work." So she hands out busy work as if it is essential. My husband's task didn't even last a full week. So he used the Internet to dig up the 6,000-page state budget, and he combs the pages for information about prison funding. Meanwhile, his co-worker received the ironic task of researching how prisons keep inmates busy.

Between us, my husband and I have been laid off six times in four years. At this point, we have a layoff routine. First, we start saving. We get our credit card balances down to

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About Penelope Trunk

Penelope Trunk is a New York-based writer who in the past has started Internet divisions at Fortune 500 companies, founded two technology-focused companies and endured an IPO, a buyout and a bankruptcy. Submit your comments [here](#) or learn more about Penelope by reading her [bio](#).

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nothing, and we each pick a few budget items that we can cut out. (For a start, I am cutting out yoga classes. He is cutting out lunches at Burger King.)

Then we go to doctor's appointments in preparation for the cheap (crappy) health insurance we will purchase when COBRA will be too expensive to maintain. (At one point in our layoff lives, our COBRA payments were about \$1,000 a month.)

Continued below

The image shows a screenshot of a mortgage search form. The form is titled "Search for your Mortgage" and is set against a light gray background with a dotted pattern. It contains three main sections: "Loan Rate" with radio buttons for "Fixed" and "Variable"; "Loan Term" with radio buttons for "30 Year" and "15 Year"; and "Loan Amount" with a text input field and a dropdown arrow. At the bottom left is the "getsmart" logo, and at the bottom right is a green "GO!" button.

There are workplace preparations, also. Cleaning out one's desk is important. My husband did not take home everything, but he left only as much at the office as he could carry home in a smooth moment of departure. Other things he took home earlier such as copies of all the stuff on the server that he might need for future reference.

When his boss is out of the office looking for funding, my husband works on his resume. When his boss is in the office, my husband makes sure to look busy. And motivated. Just because things are slow now doesn't mean they can't pick up. And if, by some miracle, the boss gets funding, my husband wants to be remembered as a person who stayed loyal to the company even in bad times. Working diligently in the face of cutbacks is a sign of loyalty.

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Even if there are layoffs, looking loyal can only help. The boss will be a good reference, and she might even give my husband some ideas for other places to work. So my husband left some key items in his cube -- a plant, a penholder, some CDs we don't listen to -- things that scream I'm here to stay, even if he doesn't believe it. Layoffs are never so close that you can stop managing what other people think of you.

I have stopped asking for news about the layoff. Clearly, it's annoying to him to have to tell me no each evening. And I don't ask about job-hunt news because I want him to see that I'm sympathetic that jobs are scarce right now.

But I'm curious. So when he says, "I'm nervous about having to find another job," I pounce on the opportunity to talk.

"What are you nervous about?"

"It's just hard," he says, "Getting my current job was so lucky."


I say, "All jobs are lucky. A job hunt is about creating luck."

"Oh, God," he says, "is that a line from one of your columns?"

"No," I say, "but it could be, couldn't it?"


-- Posted: May 12, 2003


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