

Dealing with  
tough times

## A GUIDE FOR MANAGERS

TAKING CARE OF YOUR  
STAFF - AND YOURSELF -  
DURING JOB LOSSES



# FOREWORD

## Cbus

Throughout Australia, many businesses in the construction and building industry, due to economic cycles, from time to time experience hard times.

As a result, many sub-contractors and staff in our industry lose their jobs or have to get by on reduced incomes.

This can be a stressful and difficult time for managers, business owners and their staff, as people work to provide for their families and deal with changes that are often beyond their control. This can cause health problems, both physical and mental, that need to be dealt with so those affected are able to handle life's challenges.

With this in mind, Cbus, the Master Builders Association, SuperFriend and *beyondblue: the national depression initiative* have collaborated on the production of this booklet, which gives you practical tools to assist you in supporting the wellbeing of your staff during difficult times.

However, whilst times may be tough, there is help and support available for you and your staff.

I hope you find this booklet a useful resource that helps guide you to deal with any changes you are experiencing.

The organisations involved in preparing this booklet are committed to supporting employers and members through the highs and lows of everyday life.

David Atkin  
CEO, Cbus



## Master Builders Association of Australia

Master Builders Association is delighted to partner with Cbus, SuperFriend and *beyondblue* to develop a resource to assist business owners and managers through the process of downsizing during hard economic times.

Master Builders highly recommends members to take time to read about the support available and to recognise what impact the stress and strain of running a business can have on the health and wellbeing of themselves and their staff.

We commend SuperFriend in bringing this partnership together. SuperFriend is a very positive initiative in supporting employers to achieve improved mental and physical health. A balanced lifestyle is vital in the current challenging times.

Master Builders has seen the agony of members over the years who have succumbed to the intense pressures of keeping a business afloat during difficult economic times. That is why we are joining forces with Cbus, SuperFriend and *beyondblue* in this very valuable initiative. There is no need to feel alone, as there is help and support available to help you through your difficulties.

Wilhelm Harnisch  
CEO, Master Builders Australia



## SuperFriend

SuperFriend, the Industry Funds Forum Mental Health Foundation is an Australian initiative aimed at improving the mental health and wellbeing of industry super fund members.

Developed through a partnership of industry super funds concerned about member health, SuperFriend brings together partners from industry super funds, insurers and mental health organisations to offer resources for members to assist them with seeking help for common mental health problems.

In these challenging times, it's important to take care of our physical and mental health – to see these as two sides of the same coin.

We are proud to have been part of this project, and we are especially pleased to see such commitment from the building and construction industry to support businesses and staff through these tough times.

Damian Hill  
Chair, SuperFriend – Industry Funds  
Forum Mental Health Foundation



## *beyondblue: the national depression initiative*

These are tough times for many, but help is available.

The economic downturn has hit countless Australians in all walks of life. Many people have lost their jobs or are worried about being retrenched, while others have been shocked and distressed to see the value of their assets tumble.

This can take its toll on people's physical and mental health, their relationships, their families, their wellbeing and how they see their future. Dealing with these changes can be difficult, however with information and assistance, change can be managed.

This booklet contains practical information to make sure many of the important issues associated with job loss or redundancy are addressed.

I hope you find this booklet to be helpful. It's important to remember that if you're having a tough time, relevant help is always available.

Leonie Young  
CEO, *beyondblue: the national  
depression initiative*



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# NOW WHAT?

## NO WORK?

What do you do when there will be no work for some employees in weeks to come? Knowing that workers have families to support and commitments to meet, how do you deal with that and still manage your business? These are difficult times forcing managers to make tough decisions and we know this can be hard on everyone. This booklet is designed to help you and your staff manage the best outcome possible.

## HOW WILL STAFF REACT?

It's normal for staff to feel a range of emotions at times like this: feelings of shock, anger, distress, guilt, sadness and powerlessness. See page 7 for more detail. For most people these feelings will decrease in intensity and eventually disappear over time. For others these feelings can remain or even escalate. It's important these people get help.

REMEMBER, YOU ARE NOT ALONE. HELP IS AVAILABLE.

## HOW DO YOU SUPPORT STAFF AND MANAGE CHANGE?

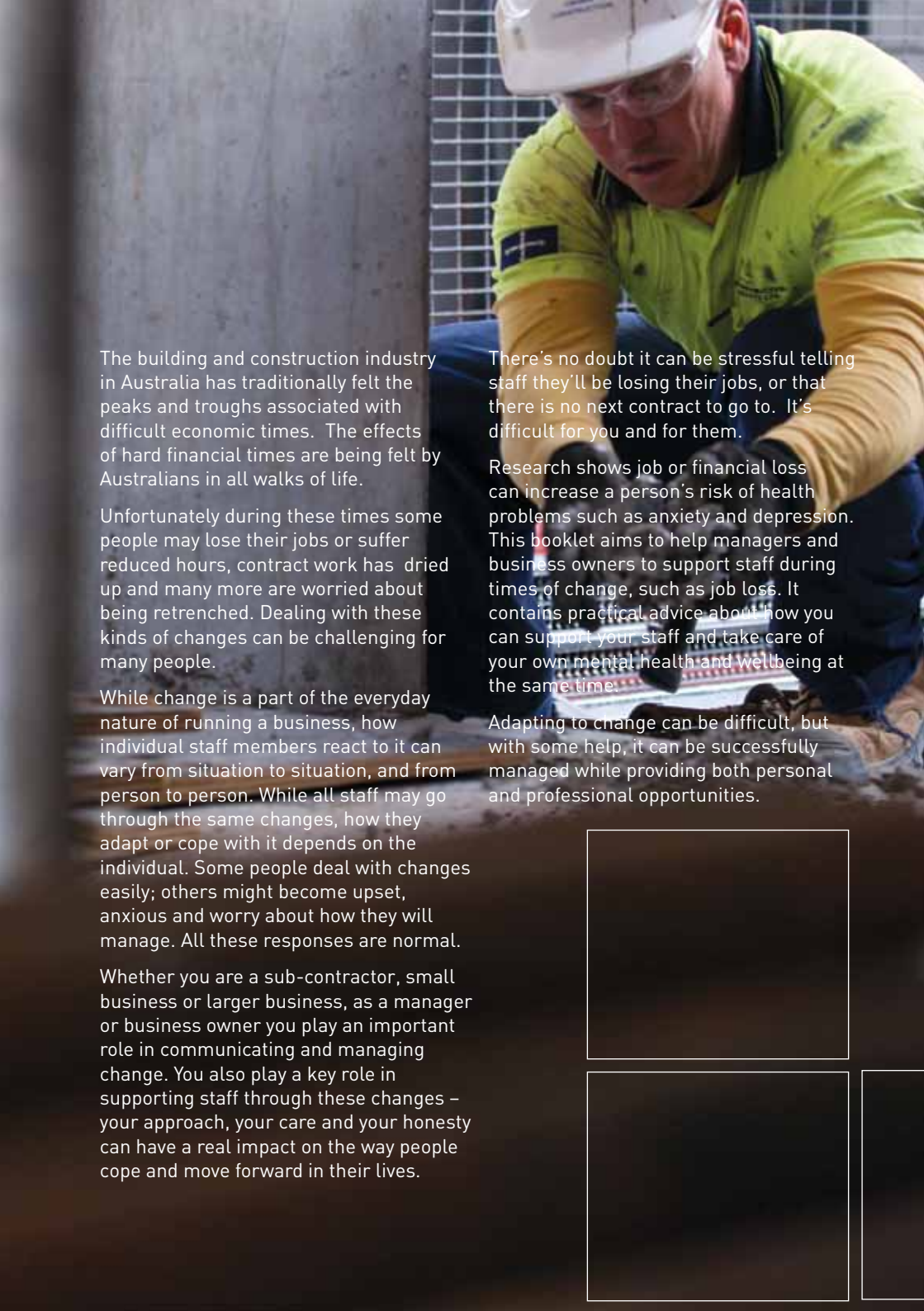
Part of being an effective manager is balancing business needs with compassion for staff. Providing as much information as you can, as often as you can, helps reduce doubt and stress. Staying calm, being clear about decisions, listening and providing avenues to get advice, be it personal, financial or otherwise can make a big difference. See pages 8 - 13.

## HELP IS OUT THERE

The list of agencies is long and help is available to everyone that needs it. Pages 16 & 17 list the government, private, religious and community-based agencies that are available to you and your staff, what they do, contact numbers – everything you need when you need it.

## TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Dealing with retrenchments and job losses can be extremely stressful. See pages 14 & 15. Keeping things in perspective, maintaining balance in your work, family and social life and looking after your health are all very important for your physical and mental health.



## WHAT RESPONSES ARE NORMAL WHEN A STAFF MEMBER IS FACED WITH JOB LOSS?

The building and construction industry in Australia has traditionally felt the peaks and troughs associated with difficult economic times. The effects of hard financial times are being felt by Australians in all walks of life.

Unfortunately during these times some people may lose their jobs or suffer reduced hours, contract work has dried up and many more are worried about being retrenched. Dealing with these kinds of changes can be challenging for many people.

While change is a part of the everyday nature of running a business, how individual staff members react to it can vary from situation to situation, and from person to person. While all staff may go through the same changes, how they adapt or cope with it depends on the individual. Some people deal with changes easily; others might become upset, anxious and worry about how they will manage. All these responses are normal.

Whether you are a sub-contractor, small business or larger business, as a manager or business owner you play an important role in communicating and managing change. You also play a key role in supporting staff through these changes – your approach, your care and your honesty can have a real impact on the way people cope and move forward in their lives.

There's no doubt it can be stressful telling staff they'll be losing their jobs, or that there is no next contract to go to. It's difficult for you and for them.

Research shows job or financial loss can increase a person's risk of health problems such as anxiety and depression. This booklet aims to help managers and business owners to support staff during times of change, such as job loss. It contains practical advice about how you can support your staff and take care of your own mental health and wellbeing at the same time.

Adapting to change can be difficult, but with some help, it can be successfully managed while providing both personal and professional opportunities.

It's normal for your staff to experience a range of reactions in response to an unexpected job loss or changing circumstances – including shock, distress, anger, guilt, sadness and helplessness. For most people, the distress will decrease and for most it will completely disappear over time.

If someone has some of these symptoms over a prolonged period and they are affecting day-to-day life, they could be at risk of developing depression or an anxiety disorder. It's important to encourage the person to talk to a doctor or other health professional. To find a local health professional, see page 16 of this booklet for support services.

Adjusting to job loss may be difficult for people who have carefully planned for their future and, through no fault of their own, find it's suddenly undone or put on hold. Some people may feel guilty or blame themselves for what has happened and feel they could've done things differently or feel they have disappointed their family.

Loss of a job, financial security and the social side of work can trigger symptoms of grief, including:

- shock, disbelief and feeling numb
- a sense of loss, not just regarding the job or finances, but also for dreams and hopes for the future
- confusion and trying to make sense of it – 'Why has this happened to me?'
- anger – a common reaction when people feel powerless or out of control
- feeling overwhelmed by day-to-day events or the future
- guilt – 'I wish I'd done things differently', 'I've disappointed my family'
- feeling isolated and alone.

### NORMAL REACTIONS CAN INCLUDE:

- difficulty getting to sleep or staying asleep
- tiredness and fatigue
- loss of appetite
- problems with memory and concentration
- feeling overwhelmed, anxious or scared
- mood swings and over-reaction to small things
- withdrawing from others
- feeling angry, frustrated and irritable
- loss of interest in sex
- physical symptoms e.g. heartburn, headaches, stomach pains
- embarrassment and guilt – 'I've let everyone down'
- feeling a loss of direction, self doubt or sense of powerlessness.

## MANAGING CHANGE IN YOUR BUSINESS

8 When dealing with change in the workplace, such as job losses, it's important to provide as much information as you can, as often as you can. As a manager or business owner, you can do much to reduce doubts and stress among staff if you clearly spell out and update information on:

- **Purpose:** Staff may not agree with the reason for job losses, but they are much less likely to resist if they understand the thinking behind it. Even if they feel disadvantaged by the change, people generally cope better with a change that makes sense for a business once it's clearly explained
- **Picture:** Staff need to be given an honest picture of what's likely to happen and what the future looks like for them and their co-staff. A part of the picture is better than no picture at all
- **Process:** You will get greater cooperation if staff have a clear idea of the steps involved in the change process and the kind of support and help that will be provided to them along the way
- **Part:** If you let people know what you want them to do and the part they need to play in the transitional period, you may be surprised at how much cooperation you get.

The most important consideration for you as a manager is to be prepared.

Remember that different people respond to different types of communication, so a combination of information, fact sheets, email notices and discussion groups will be valuable.

### TIPS TO MANAGE PEOPLE THROUGH CHANGE

- Recognise there will be an impact
- Keep yourself informed
- Tell staff as much as you can, as often as you can
- Maintain good people management practices
- Monitor how change is being received
- Monitor your own stress levels
- Prepare and prepare again.



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IMPORTANT  
CONSIDERATION  
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## WHAT YOU CAN DO: SUPPORTING STAFF WHO'VE BEEN RETRENCHED

10 Part of being an effective manager is balancing business needs with compassion for staff. While there is little you can do to change the state of the economy, there are steps you can take to make sure appropriate support is offered to retrenched staff and those remaining at work.

### Tips to consider:

- Stay calm – whatever happens
- Get to the point and communicate the decision in the first few sentences
- Be prepared to listen, wait for the staff member's response and, if necessary, restate the message
- Don't try to be a counsellor – you are the manager and must stay in that role
- Refer the person to a professional counsellor if necessary. If you have an Employment Assistance Program (EAP), talk to them, or see page 16 for a list of other services available
- Be clear about the decision and the process
- Take responsibility for the decision and the process, but be careful not to make promises you can't keep
- Respect and protect the dignity of the employee
- Be careful with the words you use – remember positions are redundant, not people.

If a redundancy payout is being offered, make sure it's clearly explained in the exit documentation. If the staff member understands that provision has been made for income during the time of redundancy they may feel less upset when sharing their experiences with their family. Suggest the staff member seeks advice before they make any financial decisions.

Cbus, Master Builders Association, SuperFriend and *beyondblue* have also produced a booklet for staff affected by job loss called 'When work dries up'.

The booklet helps people cope with the changes and challenges of job loss, providing practical tips and information on where to get help. To download your copy, visit [cbus.com.au](http://cbus.com.au).

## HANDLING DIFFICULT REACTIONS

It's not uncommon for strong emotions to be expressed during periods of job losses. It's important to respond appropriately, so have a plan. You could worsen a staff member's distress if you respond thoughtlessly or inappropriately.

### Things to remember:

- Treat each person as you would want to be treated in a similar situation
- You don't have to agree with their reactions or opinions – just validate and acknowledge them. The 'broken record' technique is a useful way to handle the more difficult responses – e.g. repeating a phrase in a calm voice, such as 'The decision is final and won't be reconsidered.'
- Do not say:
  - 'This is hard for me too.'
  - 'There's a fair bit of money in the package.'
  - 'I think we've been pretty generous.'
  - 'It's not the end of the world.'
  - 'You'll find something else.'
  - 'Don't worry, you're not the only one being made redundant.'
  - 'You might find this is the best thing that ever happened to you.'

## MANAGING MORALE OF REMAINING STAFF

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During times of job loss and redundancy, there is usually a great deal of focus on managing the redundancy process and helping staff who are leaving the business.

Often, there is much less attention paid to those remaining in the workplace.

### For remaining staff, they may:

- be concerned that more changes are to come and they may be next to leave
- be worried about an increase in their workload and an increase in pressure as a result of the reduced number of staff
- feel as though their trust in the business is shaken
- be concerned for those who have left.

Experience tells us that during these times, morale drops and resignations increase.

Recognise some staff will accept the change more quickly than others. Some will resist or be upset by the change, so be aware of and try to understand how different team members are responding.

The emotional reactions by staff remaining with the business can have a significant impact on their work performance, commitment, mental health and wellbeing.

### COMMON REACTIONS OF REMAINING STAFF

- **Relief:** the immediate response to not being made redundant
- **Guilt:** questioning whether they deserve to keep their job
- **Envy:** thinking how they might spend a large redundancy payment
- **Resentment:** increased work, reduced morale and no change in personal benefit
- **Anger:** directed at the business or those responsible for the decision.

## STRATEGIES TO HELP YOUR TEAM AFTER RETRENCHMENTS

### Provide support

Talk regularly about all of the internal and external support mechanisms available to staff, including local services, industry support services, and, where available, the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and Human Resources professionals.

### Monitor absence

Keep track of any changing pattern in work absences and check regularly with staff on how they can be supported.

### Role training

If there are changes in the type of duties staff will need to do, make sure there's appropriate training provided and check regularly with all staff that they are coping with the changes.

### Allow a transition period

Things won't run smoothly immediately during times of change, it is important to give people and processes time to adjust.

### Communication

Remember communication is the most effective tool in times of change.



## KEEPING ON TRACK: LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

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The task of retrenching staff can be a very stressful process for the manager, particularly if you haven't been involved in deciding which positions will be made redundant. This can impact on your health and wellbeing. You may find the following strategies useful.

- **Keep things in perspective.** It's important to take a step back every now and then to take a longer term view. Things can be overwhelming if you are close to them
- **Maintain balance.** Make sure there's balance between all parts of your life: physical health, personal development, work, spiritual, family relationships, social activities and financial security
- **Ask for help or talk things through.** Seek information and advice from a friend, supervisor or your Employee Assistance Program (EAP). The more you talk, the more likely it is that the situation and useful strategies will become clear
- **Take care of your health and wellbeing.** You will deal better with pressures if you are fit and healthy. When people are under pressure, personal habits often deteriorate:
  - Maintain a healthy diet and eat regularly, don't skip meals and maintain a balanced diet
  - Avoid excessive alcohol and stimulants such as caffeine
  - Get a regular good night's sleep. If this is a problem, seek help
- Take breaks every day — take a regular lunch break and try to take holiday breaks during the year
- Stay active, but don't work yourself into the ground
- **Be creative and develop options which work for you.** As well as looking after the team, don't forget to spend some time dealing with changes in your life. Ask yourself:
  - What are your priorities?
  - What do you want to achieve?
  - Where are you going?You need to give yourself time and space to ask these sorts of questions and develop answers
- **Take charge of things you can control or influence.** A key source of stress in the workplace is the sense of not being in control; of events sweeping you along. A good way to reduce the impact of the situation is to work out what you can influence or change and what you can't. If you have no influence over the outcome of a situation, then there's little point in getting stressed over it. If you can influence the outcome, then you might want to make a plan to take action
- **Seek professional support if you recognise that you need it.** Ask your Human Resources representative or see page 16 for a list of services.

## HOW TO TELL IF A REACTION IS NORMAL

Feelings often associated with financial hardship and job loss can lead to common health problems such as depression and anxiety disorders. Learning more about these conditions can help you to be aware of some of the warning signs and help you deal with them.

Mental health professionals and General Practitioners (GPs) can help people get through difficult times. It's important that you encourage someone to seek help when you believe:

- emotional reactions are severe or last longer than two weeks
- there are difficulties in doing day-to-day tasks
- alcohol or other substances are being used to 'self-medicate' or cope
- someone is thinking about self-harm or suicide.



## WHO CAN HELP?

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### INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

#### *beyondblue: the national depression initiative*

To find out more about depression, anxiety and related disorders, call the *beyondblue* info line on **1300 22 4636 (1300 bb info)** or visit the website at [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)

If you speak a language other than English and require an interpreter, ask the info line operator for assistance from the Telephone Interpreter Service. *beyondblue* fact sheets are available in 26 languages.

#### **SuperFriend**

A one-stop-shop for general and workplace based mental health and wellbeing information from a range of different services. SuperFriend is an initiative of fifteen industry superannuation funds, including Cbus. Visit the website at [www.superfriend.com.au](http://www.superfriend.com.au)

#### **Help for mental health problems under Medicare**

You may be eligible for a Medicare rebate for 12 individual consultations with a psychologist, social worker or occupational therapist in mental health if you have been referred by a GP, psychiatrist or pediatrician. To find out more, see *beyondblue* **Fact sheet 24 – Help for depression, anxiety and related disorders under Medicare.**

### MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT SERVICES

#### **Mensline Australia**

**1300 789 978** or [www.menslineaus.org.au](http://www.menslineaus.org.au)  
24-hour support for men with family and relationship problems, especially around family breakdown or separation. This service provides anonymous telephone support, information and referral (local call).

#### **Suicide Call Back Service**

**1300 659 467**  
Free national telephone counselling service for those at risk of suicide, their carers and those bereaved by suicide.

#### **Lifeline**

**13 11 14**  
24-hour crisis support, information and referral (local call).

#### **Relationships Australia**

**1300 364 277** or [www.relationships.com.au](http://www.relationships.com.au)  
Relationships Australia is a national community-based, not-for-profit organisation providing relationship support to people regardless of age, religion, gender, sexual orientation, lifestyle choice, or cultural or economic background.

#### **Suicide Helpline (Vic only)**

**1300 651 251** or [www.suicidehelpline.org.au](http://www.suicidehelpline.org.au)  
24-hour counselling, crisis intervention, information and referral (local call).

#### **Transcultural Mental Health Services**

For information about Transcultural Mental Health Services in your state/territory contact Multicultural Mental Health Australia by calling **02 9840 3333** or go to [www.mmha.org.au](http://www.mmha.org.au)

### INDUSTRY AND WORKPLACE SUPPORT SERVICES

#### **Ozhelp**

**1300 OZHELP (1300 694 357)** or [www.ozhelp.org.au](http://www.ozhelp.org.au). A workplace based program to assist staff and leaders in the Construction and Building Industry to develop resilience, suicide prevention and coping skills.

#### **Incolink (Vic only)**

**03 9639 3000** or **Toll Free: 1800 337 789** or [www.incolink.org.au](http://www.incolink.org.au)  
Incolink provides employers with a wide range of services and assistance for both them and their workers, including employment placement services, counselling for their employees, information and advisory services.

#### **Foundation House (NSW only)**

**(02) 9810 3117** or [www.cidaf.asn.au](http://www.cidaf.asn.au)  
A drug, alcohol and gambling inpatient and outpatient service providing services to building and construction industry personnel, members, family and the general public.

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Cbus, Master Builders Association, SuperFriend and *beyondblue* have also produced a booklet for staff affected by job loss called 'When work dries up'.

The booklet helps people cope with the changes and challenges of job loss, providing practical tips and information on where to get help. To download a copy online, visit [www.cbus.com.au](http://www.cbus.com.au).

## THINGS TO REMEMBER

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- Major change and job loss can be upsetting and unsettling, but as a manager there are strategies you can use to manage the process as smoothly as possible
- Treat the person with respect and compassion – remember, positions are made redundant, not people
- The emotional impact on remaining staff members can be significant – remember to provide support for these employees too
- Telling staff they will be losing their jobs can be very stressful for you. During any period of stress, take care of your own mental health and wellbeing.

This booklet has been adapted from *beyondblue's* booklet, *Taking care of your staff – and yourself – during job losses: A guide for managers*, available at [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au) or by calling 1300 22 4636.

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