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**THE WORKPLACE REPORT**

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**A Survival Guide for Laid-Off HR Staffers**



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**A Survival Guide for Laid-Off HR Staffers**



THOMAS R. LECHLEITER/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

***Welcome back! I'm Joann S. Lublin, a Wall Street Journal contributor and its former career columnist. I've written two leadership books about female executives.***



Human-resources executive Marco DeThomasis lost his job at a Boston biotech company when it downsized last year. Now, he is ready to look beyond biotech, join a startup and even move abroad so he can realize his dream of becoming a chief human-resources officer. “The more I am open to industry, company size and location, the more job possibilities come my way,” DeThomasis says.

Such flexibility is a smart job-hunting strategy if you’re among the growing number of unemployed HR staffers, according to leadership coaches, executive-search firms and HR professional groups. It is equally important that you consider a variety of career options—though they may pay less.

Online retailer Amazon.com, ride-sharing company Lyft, payments processor Stripe, technology company Meta Platforms, professional networking service LinkedIn and other U.S. businesses are shrinking their human-resources departments, often amid broad job cuts. Aerospace company Boeing, for instance, will eliminate up to 400 HR positions this year, someone familiar with the company said. The hardest hit within HR

are recruiters and similar talent-acquisition specialists; diversity, equity and inclusion professionals; and learning and development staffers.

Many laid-off HR professionals will find opportunities because they have skills “essential for businesses to effectively compete,” predicts Jim Link, CHRO of the Society for Human Resource Management.

Fifty-two percent of HR specialists and recruiters axed by big technology companies between November 2022 and January 2023 were employed as of March, according to an analysis by 365 Data Science, an online provider of data-science training. That proportion was higher than that for any of the other six job functions held by 1,157 tech industry alums tracked for the study. About four out of five rehired HR workers stayed in their profession, the analysis also found.

D’Jaris James remains passionate about HR even though Lyft laid off the DEI manager in November. “I’m doing what I was put on earth to do: Change people’s lives,” she said. “I contribute to closing the gap among disadvantaged candidates.”

James has unsuccessfully interviewed for 37 permanent positions since her job loss. Some employers outside tech reject her “once you tell them your compensation expectations,” she says. In March, James got a temporary gig assisting Georgia Tech Research Institute, a nonprofit applied research arm of the Georgia Institute of Technology, with hiring strategies. By early 2024, she plans to launch her own HR consultancy.

But leaping from practitioner to small-business operator isn’t always an easy transition, and a consultancy could prove less lucrative than corporate HR roles, warns Laurence J. Stybel, co-founder of Stybel Peabody Associates, a leadership advisory firm that offers C-Suite outplacement services. “It depends on how well networked you are. Making the adjustment to the sales demands of HR consulting can be difficult for some professionals.”

Some unemployed HR professionals may choose to opt for extra training that would make them a more attractive hiring prospect for human-resources and non-HR roles.

“Take a couple of online classes in data analytics and storytelling so you can contextualize HR data in a way that connects it back to the business,” recommends Kevin Martin, chief research officer at the Institute for Corporate Productivity, a human-capital research and advisory firm.

At my request, Martin informally surveyed individuals attending a recent institute conference about the best next opportunity for a recently laid-off HR staffer. More than half of the 149 HR managers and executives favored upskilling, or improving one’s proficiency in a certain skill.

“You have to adapt your skills and pivot,” says Tina Bjork, director of learning and performance strategy for a big financial-services company. “I’ve had to reskill and upskill.” Bjork, who was laid off by online furniture retailer Wayfair last July, gained professional research skills by helping the Institute for Corporate Productivity prepare an upskilling toolkit. She says the two-month assignment also taught her the importance of bravely doing “something you’ve never done before.” She began her current job in December.

Switching professions scares risk-averse HR staffers even more. But it’s not an unreasonable career move. Internal recruiters, for instance, have skills ranging from digital marketing to social-media content management that they can transfer to marketing roles, suggests Jeanne Meister, executive vice president of Executive Networks. The San Francisco-based resource group serves HR leaders.

Jobless corporate recruiters also are getting hired for sales and internal communications roles. Theresa de la Osa, an executive recruiter at software company Slack Technologies who was laid off in March, hopes her stints luring talent to four tech companies will win her a recruiter spot at an executive-search firm. One search firm has already rejected de la Osa.

She worries that corporate recruiters could face bias that they “have it easier,” she says. “You don’t have to earn the business the same way.”

Jason Hanold has a different perspective. “Veteran in-house recruiters have the easiest transition into executive search,” says the chief executive and managing partner of Hanold Associates, an executive search and leadership advisory firm that focuses on HR leader recruitment. De la Osa is a candidate for a recruiter job at his firm. Meanwhile, Hanold remains upbeat about the employment chances for DeThomasis, whom Hanold Associates initially wooed to his previous employer. “He is a very talented leader,” the recruiter observes.

“My ideal CHRO job is out there. I will find that needle in the haystack,” says DeThomasis, aged 50. “It will probably be my last job before I retire.”