

After The Lay Off

What happens when expats lose their jobs in Vietnam? Can time away be a blessing in disguise? Words by Will Peach.

LOSING YOUR JOB IS POSSIBLY ONE of the worst things that can happen. But when you're away from home and without a network of family and friends to fall back on, things can be even tougher.

For many expats here this brutal truth is a reality. The recent global downturn has spelled the death knell for many jobs that were once considered safe and viable. With no benefit system to fall back on, and few recruitment agencies out there, unemployment in Vietnam can seemingly become quite a nightmare.

But while some people let their misery get the better of them, others have seized upon the period of unemployment to work constructively toward bettering themselves.

◉ Bouncing Back

Last year British-born Naim Khan-Turk was relishing his position as a director at a well-known international real estate company. Having worked his way up from the position of senior manager to director in a matter of three years, Naim had built a strong reputation for that of himself and his team.

Flash forward to mid-August and he felt the pressure of the global recession. Foreign players were pulling out of the market and the company was forced into making job cuts to stay afloat. Unfortunately for him, Naim found himself on the wrong side of the chopping board.

"After nearly four years it came to an end, which was sad," he says. "I really enjoyed the job and built up a great team of people. We had the spirit of camaraderie, a good working environment, and when that came to an end it was a shock to the system."

Initially Naim was forced to think about what he would do. Going back to England wasn't an option, returning to work was difficult because of the market situation.

"I could have gone on and sat on a beach for a few months, but I knew that after about a week I'd get very bored," he says. "I could have become a lounge lizard and took to hanging around at bars all day, but again I realised that wasn't right either."



Luckily he managed to channel his time positively. Previously, because of his heavy business regime, often working from early morning to late night, networking at business functions and wining and dining associates, he put on weight and in his own words "ballooned up to 105 kilos." So naturally the time-off became gym time.

"I started working out every day and set myself targets," he says. "It's working well; I've lost over 12kg in two and a half months. That's what I did to keep myself focused and get myself up in the morning."

◉ Looking For Work

But while he continues to work out and focus his energy on losing weight, time-off has also given him a renewed sense of energy with which to get back into the working world.

Having sent off CVs to agencies, colleagues

and approached companies face to face, Naim is seemingly relaxed about his prospects.

"It's given me the time to sit back and reflect on what it is I do want to do," he says, having considered the opportunity of setting up his own business.

As for staying positive he also offers good advice to those in a similar position.

"Give yourself something to focus on in the interim period, have something that occupies your mind for a certain period of the day. But you still have to go out and network, you never know when someone might turn around and offer you something."

While it may take some time to find another job, don't waste it. Here are some things to do after being laid off:

1) Assess your financial situation: Make

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- 2) Spruce up your CV: This is a no-brainer.
- 3) Ask yourself, do you need a career change? Maybe it is time for a career change. Ask those deep questions: What kind of job do I want? Where do I want to work? Should I change my specialisation?
- 4) Put your extra time to good use: If you don't want to consider consulting or temp work, then make sure your days are busy. Chores around the house are nice to get done, but it is also best to take some time to learn some new skills. Learning Vietnamese will be a definite asset to your CV as will doing some online studying.
- 5) Freelance: This may not apply for some, but in many industries (software, accounting, data entry, etc) freelancing is a viable alternative to full-time work. Even if you can't find enough freelance work to fill all your time, every dollar you earn freelancing helps stretch your savings that much further.
- 6) Start your own company: Who needs a job, anyway? If you can't beat 'em, join 'em. There are plenty of businesses you can start without much capital. Find a niche that's missing here and fill it.
- 7) Go on vacation! Go on, you deserve it. Unless you're completely broke, a short vacation will rejuvenate and get you fired up for your job search. You don't have to spend a lot of money, either. Something as simple as a weekend in the mountains or at the beach will do the trick. 