

# THE LAYOFF TALK, MK2

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**ARE YOU GOING TO GET  
LAID OFF SOMEDAY?**



**ARE YOU GOING TO GET  
LAID OFF SOMEDAY?**

**Probably.**

**SHOULD YOU BE AFRAID  
OF BEING LAID OFF?**



# SHOULD YOU BE AFRAID OF BEING LAID OFF?

Probably not.

# HOW VOLATILE IS IT REALLY?

## Snapshot: Experience and Job Security

The majority of employees in the industry are still either young or relatively inexperienced. Almost half of respondents (48%) indicated that they have between one and six years of experience and only 1% reported over 25 years of experience in the industry. An overwhelming majority of these respondents had been with their company for at least a year, 84% said that they had not been laid off in the past two years, and 69% reported that they had had one or two employers in the past five years. However, 25% have had three or four employers in the past five years and some churn is reflected in the intentions of employees to stay with their

**Developer Satisfaction Survey, 2015  
(similar numbers for 2016 and 2017)**

## Snapshot: Employment Volatility

While 70% of respondents indicated that they were permanent employees, when asked about the number of employers they have had in the past 5 years, the response average among employees was 2.2. Surprisingly, this is not so different from freelancers/contractors for whom the average was 3.6. This indicates that employees are often hired and let go while freelancers seem to maintain stable relationships with a core set of clients. The average among the self-employed was 2.9, who were asked how many employers they have had in the past 5 years not counting themselves. Coupled with the fact that 66% of self-employed respondents said that they had worked for other game-related employers in the past, this suggests that many self-employed developers start their own businesses after working in the industry and that this is a relatively recent shift for many of the respondents.

**Developer Satisfaction Survey, 2017**

## Snapshot: Experience and Job Security

The majority of employees in the industry were relatively inexperienced. Just under half (49%) indicated that they have been in the industry for six or fewer years, while 36% had worked in the industry for ten years or more. Almost three-quarters (70%) had had one or two employers in the past five years and, over one quarter (27%) had had three to five employers in the past five years. Industry churn was also reflected in the limited expectation among employees to remain with their current employers for the long term. Most respondents seemed to expect high job mobility (Figure 4).

**Developer Satisfaction Survey, 2017**

## Snapshot: The Unemployed

Just fewer than 4% of the survey sample (20 respondents) indicated that they were currently unemployed in the game industry. Among the unemployed group 50% were permanently laid off, 20% had ended a contract and had not found a new one, and 10% said they were in between contracts.

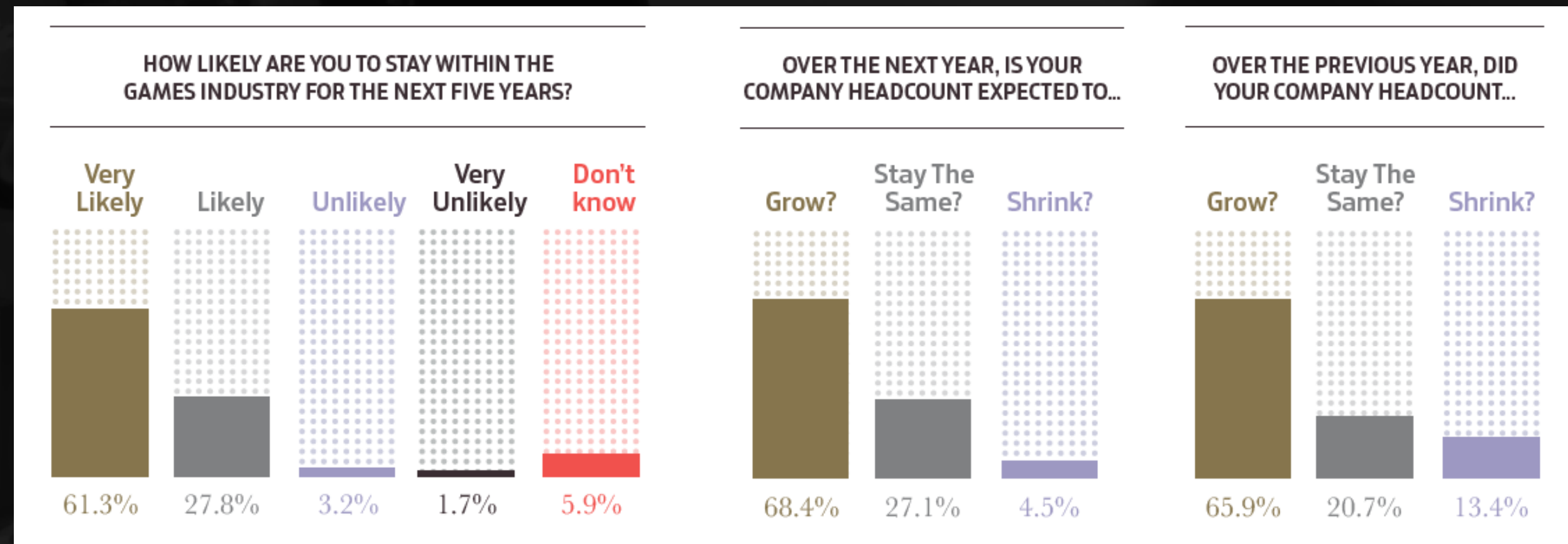
One quarter (25%) of unemployed respondents have been unemployed for more than one year, 55% have been unemployed for between 3 and 12 months. The remaining 20% had been unemployed for 2 months or less. The majority wanted to find another job in the game industry (89%).

**Developer Satisfaction Survey, 2017**

**(2017 DSS – 963 Total Responses)**

# HOW VOLATILE IS IT REALLY?

GamesIndustry.biz Careers Survey 2018



(Similar actual headcount reductions in 2017's survey)

"It's impossible to ignore the reliance on overtime. Only 14.2% of respondents claimed they are never expected to work beyond their contracted hours"

43% - 41-50 hrs/week  
12% - 50+ hrs/week  
3.7% - 60+ hrs/week

(2018 CS - 700 Total Responses)

Churn suggests frequent job changes, either by choice or by force.

Your chances of encountering a layoff in any given year are low (statistically speaking! This is on average!)

Anecdotally, I can't think of a single game dev friend or acquaintance who HASN'T experienced at least 1 layoff at some point in their career.

# 31 FLAVORS OF INSTABILITY!

There are plenty of industries that are volatile and “volatility” is a magical buffet of different types and flavors!

- Instability
- Overtime
- Crunch Periods
- Unreasonable Schedules
- High-Stress Situations
- Poor Pay
- Public-Facing
- Insufficient Workload
- Hazardous Materials
- High-Risk/Low-Reward
- Bureaucracy
- Extreme Temperatures, Dirt, etc
- High Emotion/Drama

Games has its own bouquet of volatility.  
Flavors generally include:

- Instability
- Overtime
- Crunch Periods
- High-Risk/Low-Reward

Some positions in games can also include:

- Poor Pay
- Public-Facing
- Bureaucracy
- High Emotion/Drama



# GOOD REASONS, ROUGH TRADEOFFS

**YOU** decided to get into games. Why? LIST and ANALYZE the reasons.

Here are mine:

I love games and the process of making them.

I love digital and 3D art. Games are where that's at.

I love being a small part of something BIG.

I love working on high-visibility projects.

I love that other people love games.

I love how laid back my day-to-day life is.

I genuinely enjoy going to work 99.9% of the time.

The work makes me happy.

Understand the potential tradeoffs for choosing games.

Here are some:

Volatility and instability are absolutely on the table at all times.

Games are a 'rock star business'. If they hits stop, so does the work.

Pay can be low given some of the risks.

Game dev tends to be located in STUPID EXPENSIVE places.

The more creative control you want, the more instability there is.

The public is passionate about what you're doing.

So every year or two, ask yourself:

**HOWS IT GOING?  
IS THIS WHERE I WANT TO BE?  
WHERE DO I WANT TO BE INSTEAD?**

Or in other words...





WHAT  
DO  
YOU  
WANT?

# THE IMPENDING INEVITABILITY OF UNEMPLOYMENT: Sword of Damocles or Circadian Rhythm?

Can you stop a layoff? No.

Can you prevent a studio closure? Not really.

Is it GOING to happen to you? Maybe. (Probably) (yes)

**LETS ASSUME IT WILL.**

# **THE IMPENDING INEVITABILITY OF UNEMPLOYMENT: Sword of Damocles or Circadian Rhythm?**

**If we assume layoffs are a high probability if not inevitable, then it makes sense to acknowledge them and prepare for them.**

**It is possible to prepare for a layoff in meaningful ways. They do NOT have to be sudden or unexpected.**

**They will ALWAYS be traumatic, however. Layoffs are stressful and they suck. Preparation can't really prevent that.**

**Knowing this beforehand, however, CAN help.**

**As artists, we derive our identity from the work we do. Practice disconnecting this. YOU ARE NOT YOUR JOB.**

**Layoffs are never personal nor do they reflect in any way on your abilities, talents, experiences, or accomplishments.**

**Employment is a SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP. As soon as that symbiosis becomes unbalanced, the countdown timer starts.**

**Layoffs are not the end of the world. Life continues. The things that are important to you remain.**

# **THE IMPENDING INEVITABILITY OF UNEMPLOYMENT:**

## **Layoff Prep Stage 1 – Develop a Healthy Suspicion**

### **BEFORE GETTING HIRED**

- Begin to develop a mental map of the industry.**
- Follow industry news and trends.**
- Keep track of patterns of rumors about certain companies.**
- Ask your network about companies.**
- Read news articles, deep dives, post-mortems, tweets, experiences, etc about past industry layoffs.**
- Make note of perceived warning signs and reasons that lead to layoffs.**

**Generally start to develop a feel for reading the industry's health as a whole. Don't put too much stock in any individual source's current tantrums, but look at overall trends over time. Ask olds how they feel about the industry, but again, don't take their answer as Truth but as just another piece of evidence.**

**You're looking for PATTERNS OVER TIME.**

# **THE IMPENDING INEVITABILITY OF UNEMPLOYMENT:**

## **Layoff Prep Stage 1 – Develop a Healthy Suspicion**

### **DURING THE INTERVIEW**

- “How much runway do you have?”
- “Where does your funding come from?”
- “What would happen if the genre you work in went away?”
- “What are your primary monetization sources?”
- “How many of your games have been ‘do-or-die’ products?”
- “What kind of growth are you planning in the next 2-5 years?”
- “How’s turnover here?”
  
- Seek out or request separate discussion with employee(s).

**Note: No one will ever admit in a professional setting that their company is unstable. (They may be lying to themselves more than to you).**

**Pay attention to how you feel from the interview and what isn’t said or HOW things are said.**

**“Smelly Interviews”**

# **THE IMPENDING INEVITABILITY OF UNEMPLOYMENT:**

## **Layoff Prep Stage 2 - Have a Plan (To Kill Everyone You Meet)**

### **IN THE GOOD TIMES**

#### **Worst Case Scenario Thinking**

Occasionally mentally run through the worst case scenarios (especially if you're starting to suspect an incoming layoff). This means logically walking yourself through as thorough a layoff scenario as you can figure. Start with "What if I was laid off tomorrow?"

- Trial run your budget. Find the holes and danger points in your financials. What is now at risk? Make plans to shore up weakpoints.
- Trial run your emotions. What would really hurt? Would you cry? Would you be angry? Who would you be angry at? Would it damage your identity? Why?
- Trial run a worst-timing-ever layoff. Would you have to move? Move back in with family? Would that be so awful? If so, what could you do instead? Would your landlord throw you out? Would you end up homeless? What about medications? Pregnancies? Would your kids have to change schools? Have you talked to them about that possibility (age permitting)?



# **THE IMPENDING INEVITABILITY OF UNEMPLOYMENT:** **Layoff Prep Stage 2 - Have a Plan (To Kill Everyone You Meet)**

## **IN THE GOOD TIMES**

### **INFORM and COMMUNICATE**

- Identify and inform lifelines. (Friends, family, etc)
- Identify avenues of retreat. (physically moving)
- Communicate with your dependents/partners?

**How would a layoff affect the GROUP?**

- Research **NOW** what benefits you are entitled to.

Unemployment, severance, food stamps, medicaid, mortgage forbearance, student loan deferment, COBRA

### **BE LIKE THE SQUIRREL, JANET**

- Rolling portfolio and resume updates. Yearly at a minimum.
- Pull art often.
- Cultivate your professional network. **MAKE FRIENDS** and hang out with them.
- Keep in touch.
- Set up for freelance/contracting. (Fill resume holes, set up official entity, learn pitching, gig finding, etc.
- Work for each other.
- Consider dual incomes.
- Negotiate and maneuver for salary.

# **THE IMPENDING INEVITABILITY OF UNEMPLOYMENT:** **Layoff Prep Stage 2 - Have a Plan (To Kill Everyone You Meet)**

## **IN THE GOOD TIMES**

# **‘F\*CK YOU’ MONEY**

**You MUST be saving. This part is hard and it sucks.**

**If there's one thing that has the BIGGEST impact on your emotional and physical well-being after a layoff it will be whether or not you have a full emergency fund.**

**6 FULL MONTHS OF YOUR STANDARD EXPENSES.**

**Can you live farther and pay a bit more in gas but save more? Can you go without luxuries like Netflix? Spotify? Can your household use only 1 car? No car? Cheaper food? Fewer clothes? Cheaper clothes? Longer-lasting clothes? LED light bulbs? Gig on weekends for extra money? Ask for a raise. Negotiate higher salary and save the difference. Get a (paying) roommate. Live with family. Dual incomes. Work remote. Work from home. Set and use a budget if you have to. SAVE SAVE.**

# THE IMPENDING INEVITABILITY OF UNEMPLOYMENT:

## Layoff Prep Stage 1 – Develop a Healthy Suspicion

### WHILE EMPLOYED

- Continue to follow trends!
- Carefully watch the health of your genre.
- Stay informed on shareholder calls/earnings calls/sales numbers.
- Pay attention to the C-levels. What they say and what they don't talk about. Watch their stress levels and behaviors.
- Watch who comes into the office. Be curious about visitors.
- Talk to coworkers and check in with how they're feeling. Include folks outside your department. (Ava concept department)
- Keep track of your publisher as much as your employer, if not more.

The head dudes will show the truth. Over time, pick up on how they talk, what's empty rah-rah talk, and what they look/sound like when they're concerned.

They'll never tell it straight if there's trouble, but they'll show it in stress, lack of communication, careful omission or dodging talking about certain subjects, etc.

# THE IMPENDING INEVITABILITY OF UNEMPLOYMENT:

## Layoff Prep Stage 1 – Develop a Healthy Suspicion

### WHILE EMPLOYED

#### DANGERZONES:

- The ~6 months after shipping a product.
- The days/weeks leading up to shareholder/earnings calls.
- The end of the calendar year.
- The end of the fiscal year.

#### Shareholder Earnings Calls:

These are phonecalls CEOs have to make by law usually every quarter wherein they give an account of business decisions and financials to shareholders. The scripts here are very controlled, as are the order of events leading up to them. Layoffs often happen surrounding these calls as a response to disappointing performance.

# THE IMPENDING INEVITABILITY OF UNEMPLOYMENT: Layoff Prep Stage 3 - Into the Breach

## LAYOFF DAY 1-3, GET TO WORK.

- Inform your support network.
- Activate your freelance/contracting network.
- Apply for unemployment (this process takes time and is often stupid and confusing at first).
- Look into COBRA. You have time to apply for this and it is retroactive, but start refreshing your knowledge. COBRA is expensive.
- Maslow's scale of needs: cover the basics, which usually translates to...
- Take stock of your financial situation.
- Identify outflow and income. Make sure you include unemployment payments, severance, COBRA, etc.
- Income more than outflow? You're in good shape!
- Income less than outflow? Work on outflow first: Cable tv, cellphone, subscriptions, etc. Identify how to save money. Cut back luxury items. Contact mortgage lender or landlord about hardship deferments. Contact student loan for deferment. Gaming multiplayer subscriptions, software subscriptions (or scale back), cancel insurance on a 2nd car, cancel amazon subscriptions, downgrade cellphone plan, get on the phone with isp and threaten to cancel if you can't get a better rate, get on the phone and ask people to let you pay less.

# THE IMPENDING INEVITABILITY OF UNEMPLOYMENT: Layoff Prep Stage 3 – Into the Breach

## LAYOFF WEEKS 2-6, DIG IN.

- Start thinking medium-term. How long will money last? How long is your RUNWAY?
- What do you do when you run out of RUNWAY?
- Stage yourself for those eventualities.
- Communicate with your support network. “Can I still come stay with you if I lose my housing?” “Is there still help for me where you are?”
- Execute on your PLAN. Apply to jobs.
- Consider taking time for your portfolio. You have 8 hours a day of free time now.
- Continue to engage with freelance networks.
- Continue to engage with professional networks.
- Make networking a daily effort. A little bit of time each day.
- Stay on top of new annoying routines like applying for weekly unemployment checks.
- Take care of your health. Spend the \$300 on preventative care instead of the \$3000 on ER, etc.
- Be agile, light, smart, clever.
- Be active, physically, creatively, but also in the job finding process. It’s tiring but worth it.



# THE TRUTHS

Your job is not your identity.

You have value beyond your art.

You are in good company.

It will be ok.

That which is most important still remains.

Many people want you to succeed.

You are capable of navigating this.



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