

IN-DEPTH

While unpredictability is par for the course in football management, finding yourself out of work presents a whole other level of change and uncertainty. Mentally resilient managers, however, will see opportunities to move forward.

WHICH WAY NOW?

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The human mind doesn't like change and uncertainty and we feel less stressed when we know what's coming, even if it's going to be painful. "Scientific studies have found that most people would rather know that they're going to have a negative experience (such as an electric shock) than be unable to predict it," says Clinical Psychologist Dr Fairuz Awenat.

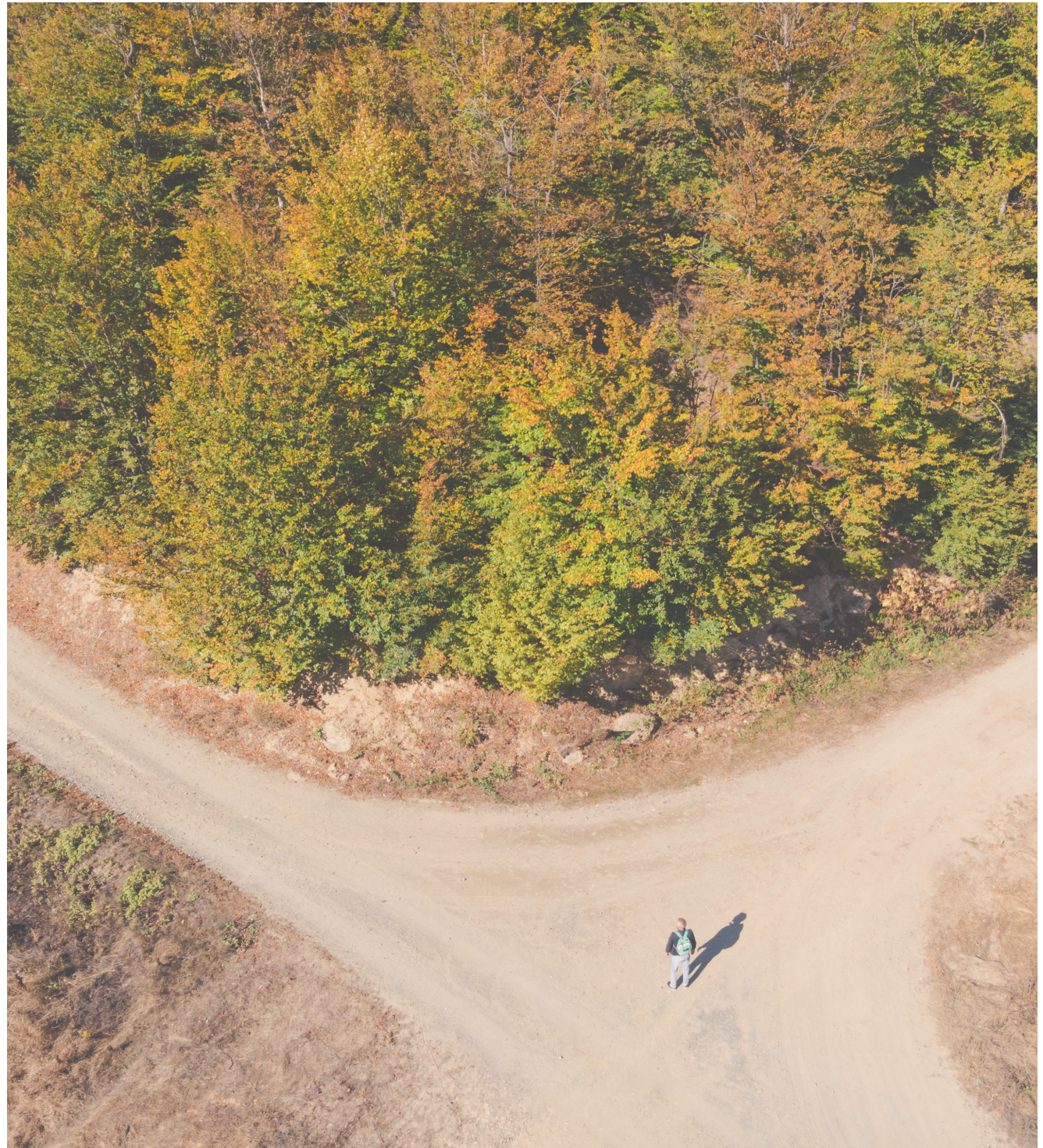
From an evolutionary perspective, this fear of the unknown makes total sense. "Being familiar with your environment and able to predict things has strong survival benefits, because by knowing what's coming you can prepare to deal with it," says Awenat. "Unfortunately, as a result, we've evolved to judge the feeling of uncertainty itself as a threat."

For a manager, suddenly being out of work is one of the biggest and potentially most damaging changes

they'll face. Given the commitment, passion and hard work required to survive, let alone succeed, many managers will identify themselves primarily with their profession. Their self worth, meanwhile, will stem largely from how well they are judged to be doing in that role. It's only natural, then, that when that job is taken away, even if only for a relatively short period, it can leave a manager feeling lost, isolated, without purpose and lacking in confidence; some managers describe the feelings as very much like grief.

ACCEPTANCE

"It is the things that matter most to us in life that cause us the most pain, so it's inevitable that when things don't go the way we want or threaten to go wrong it causes psychological pain. This is what's known as 'the reality gap' - the gap between the reality you want and the one you currently have," says Awenat. "In such situations, we often expect ourselves ➤



➤ to not feel these unwanted emotions, but humans are supposed to feel pain when things they care about go wrong; it's unavoidable. What is key is how you respond to it."

Allowing yourself some time to work through your thoughts and emotions following a career setback can be highly productive. Ask what actions or behaviours might have brought about a different outcome, perhaps talking to those you trust and whose opinions you respect for their perspectives. However, what's important is that you set a time limit on this period of reflection, after which you stop looking backwards and turn your gaze only to the future.



"Faced with unwelcome challenges, the human mind often kicks into dwelling on problems that are out of its control, predicting future ones, and constantly time travelling between the past and future," says Awenat. "The problem is that while we're doing this we're missing out on actually living life right now. We spend more time worrying about the problem than taking effective action to deal with it."

It's important also to maintain perspective on an unwanted or difficult situation and ask how you might grow from it, she adds. "Have you ever dealt with, or felt, something similar? What helped you get through that? What resources and support might you need to help you deal with it in the best way possible? How might you look at this situation in a year, two years, or more? Would it feel as catastrophic as it feels right now? It's also useful to step back and try to see it as someone else might - how would they view the situation and how would you encourage them to respond?"

GET BUSY

Proactivity is, therefore, incredibly important, in terms of continuing your career journey and for your mental wellbeing. Time out of the profession can enable you to take advantage of learning opportunities that might otherwise have been difficult or out of reach. There are endless opportunities to expand your horizons, improve your portfolio and add to your contacts list.

"Boost your self-confidence by self-assessing and identifying what your core strengths are and where you've been most successful, then start to take back control by building on these areas," advises LMA Technical Director Dr Wayne Allison. "Learning a language, presenting and public speaking are great ways to build your communication skills and confidence, while you might consider working with a PR firm to help strengthen your personal brand."

Getting involved in charitable or voluntary work is another great way

to keep active and develop new skills and contacts, while enabling you to give something back to the local community.

EXPAND YOUR HORIZONS

Allison also advises trying to gain inspiration and ideas from many different sources, watching as much football and other managers as possible and taking sabbaticals and study visits abroad. "Visiting clubs in the UK and abroad can open your eyes to other ways of doing things, help validate your own methods and expand your contacts book," he says. "Consider looking also at other sports, as there may be issues and trends there that are relevant and that you can learn from. The bigger your network, the greater the insight you will have into what's going on around the world and the better your exposure to potential learning and career opportunities."

Mentoring, too, can be very valuable during periods away from management, whether you're on the ➤

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SEEDS VS SWITCHES

"We're hard-wired to behave in ways that offer short-term relief, so when a negative event or change, such as redundancy, throws us off course, we may turn to what feels like a quick fix," says Awenat. "Coping behaviours such as alcohol, shopping or eating are known as 'switches'; they may make us feel better in the short term, but you don't grow psychologically from them and there is often a greater price to pay in the long term. 'Seeds', such as exercise, spending time with family or meditation, meanwhile, take time and effort, but they provide growth and longer-term solutions."

➤ receiving end or are offering your services to a younger coach. A mentor may help you to identify your super-strengths, find new avenues for growth or help you find the courage to take your career in a new direction. The process may also help you to work through any self-confidence issues you have.

STAY CONNECTED

While it would be easy to see time out of full-time employment as a break, it's perhaps even more important during these periods to remain a visible and active part of the industry.

"It's up to you to be proactive and stay abreast of issues, trends and opinions," says Allison. "That means staying connected, making the most of formal and informal networking opportunities, attending industry events and engaging in media activities. "As well as keeping you in touch with what's going on, it will help to maintain your profile. This is absolutely key if you want to progress your career, as it ensures your name and face are front of mind when job openings arise and that you're seen as being active and relevant."

Of course, to some extent, how well you're able to bounce back, psychologically and professionally, from a career setback will depend on the groundwork you have laid up to this point. How mentally resilient are you, and how good are your personal and professional support networks? While there may be sense in managing as if you're in it for the long-haul, it also helps to be mentally prepared for quite the opposite, ready to be proactive, take back control and continue on your career journey. **M**



ACTION PLAN

Accept your emotions — don't berate yourself for what's totally normal

Don't dwell on it — set a time limit to mull over recent events, then look forward

Keep perspective — ask how someone else might view the situation

Self-assess — identify your key strengths and past successes

Find opportunities to grow — attend a course, learn a language, watch others... the possibilities are endless

Reach out — don't be too proud to enquire about potential job opportunities or other chances to gain experience

Consider mentoring — it's likely your mentor will have experienced a similar situation and can provide support

Network — stay connected to people and the industry

Update your CV and portfolio — make sure they are ready to impress

Avoid short-term 'fixes' — such as alcohol or comfort food (see the 'seeds and switches' boxout for effective alternatives)

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