

The Survivor's Desk

Those who stay carry the cut. A 30-day protocol for managers and remaining teams after layoffs that protects output without pretending nothing happened.

Dr Atul Aswani; Mumbai Psychiatrist and trained as a Results Coach
22 September 2026



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PUBLISHED

22 September 2026 · English edition · emotionapp.in/research/the-survivors-desk

01

Executive summary

Seventy-four per cent of employees who kept their jobs after a corporate layoff said their own productivity had declined. That drop is survivor load — the extra emotional and work load carried by employees who remain after a layoff. In India the load is no longer a Western case study. Public tech cuts, mid-level releases at the largest IT firms, and quieter bench exits have left managers holding teams that are smaller, more anxious and still expected to ship. In a Pune delivery team, the Monday stand-up has two fewer faces. Their tickets now sit with the people still on the call. The release date has not moved. Older writing called this layoff survivor syndrome. The name described the feeling. It did not give the CHRO a protocol.

Leadership goes quiet after the all-hands. A resilience webinar lands the following Friday. A manager is asked whether there is another round and has no line to give. Each of these makes post layoff employee morale worse, not better. This paper sets out a 30-day protocol for managing teams after layoffs in India. It protects layoff survivors productivity without pretending nothing happened. EmotionApp delivers the work as countable daily reps, with an AI coach and a human hand-off, in 23 Indian languages, WhatsApp first. The platform is non-clinical. It does not offer diagnosis, treatment or therapy. If distress is beyond coaching, the person is handed to a specialised professional. Data stay in India. The work is built under ISO 9001 and ISO 13485 and is aligned to the Digital Personal Data Protection Act.

02

The problem in India: managing teams after layoffs

The people who leave take a package. The people who stay take the work. They also take the silence, the extra tickets, and the question nobody puts on the all-hands slide: why them and not me. That is survivor load. It sits under two labels the CHRO already uses: post layoff employee morale, and layoff survivors productivity. Treat only the feeling, or only the queue, and both still fall.

Joel Brockner's research, running from laboratory studies in the 1980s to field work in the 1990s, established the pattern. Survivors do not become grateful engines. Their reactions track how fair the cut looked, how well those who left were treated, and how much control those who stayed still feel they have. When survivors identify with people who left and judge the compensation as

thin, commitment and performance fall. Job insecurity does not produce a clean burst of extra effort. The relationship is an inverted U: too little threat and people coast; too much threat and work effort drops.

A 2010 review of 91 downsizing studies by Datta, Guthrie, Basuil and Pandey reached the same directional conclusion at firm level. Hoped-for performance gains often fail to arrive. At individual level, survivors typically show lower involvement, lower commitment and higher strain. Fairness, communication and supervisor support change the size of the hit. They do not remove the hit.

Job insecurity itself is not a mood. Sverke, Hellgren and Näswall's 2002 meta-analysis put numbers on the associations. Across 50 samples and 28,885 people, job insecurity correlated $-.41$ with job satisfaction. Across 30 samples, it correlated $-.36$ with organisational commitment. Across eight samples, it correlated $-.50$ with trust. Across 12 samples, it correlated $-.20$ with performance. Across 26 samples, it correlated $+.28$ with turnover intention. These are corrected correlations, not percentages. They are large enough that a CHRO cannot treat insecurity as background noise.

The applied survey that still sets the management number is Leadership IQ's study of 4,172 workers at 318 companies that had laid people off in the previous six months. Seventy-four per cent of those who kept their jobs said their own productivity had declined. Sixty-nine per cent said product or service quality had declined. Eighty-seven per cent were less likely to recommend the organisation as a place to work. Sixty-four per cent said colleagues' productivity had also fallen. Eighty-one per cent said customer service had declined. Seventy-seven per cent said they were seeing more errors. The three words that came up most often were guilt, anxiety and anger.

The same study named the lever. Workers who gave their managers high scores for visibility, approachability and candour were 72 per cent less likely to report a productivity drop and 65 per cent less likely to report a quality drop. The protocol in this paper is built on that finding. The manager is the intervention. The app is the scaffold.

What the India numbers actually say

India does not publish a clean national census of tech layoffs. Public trackers miss silent PIP exits, bench releases and withdrawn joining letters. The honest picture is a set of dated counts, each with a caveat. Use them as a floor, not a total.

Tata Consultancy Services told the market in July 2025 that it would release about 2 per cent of its global workforce over the financial year — more than 12,000 people from a base of 613,069 as at 30 June 2025 — mainly in middle and senior grades. Reuters framed the cut as the start of a wider reset in a sector then worth \$283 billion. India's five largest listed IT firms together recorded a net headcount drop of nearly 7,000 in FY26, reversing the prior year's net adds. TCS accounted for most of that decline.

The multinational track is separate and just as visible to the remaining team. The Economic Times reported in September 2026 that Oracle had cut 21,000 jobs globally earlier in the year, including about 12,000 in India, with a further

India round estimated at around 3,000. Mint reported the same week that Oracle, PayPal, Amazon, Adidas and Meta together had trimmed 12,000–15,000 India roles in the previous 12 months. Inc42 counted more than 9,500 Indian start-up layoffs in 2025. The Hindu Business Line, citing layoffs.fyi, counted 4,282 public start-up cuts across 25 companies from January to October 2025, against 14,978 across 108 companies in 2023.

Globally, layoffs.fyi recorded 152,922 tech jobs cut in 2024, 122,606 in 2025, and 129,153 in 2026 by mid-September. These are public-event totals, not a labour-force census. They are large enough to set the climate in Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Pune and Gurugram even when a given firm has not cut.

Gallup does not run a post-layoff panel in India. Do not read the next paragraph as a survivor experiment. It is the backdrop. Employee engagement in India stood at 23 per cent in 2025, down from 30 per cent in 2024 and 32 per cent in 2023 on Gallup's published series. Manager engagement in India fell from 39 per cent to 30 per cent. Individual contributors stood at 19 per cent. Gallup estimates India's current disengagement costs \$351 billion, or about ₹32.7 trillion, a year. Global engagement in 2025 was 20 per cent, the lowest since 2020. South Asia recorded the largest regional drop. A workforce already this thin does not absorb survivor load for free.

Table 1. Dated counts a CHRO can defend. Each row is a different measurement. Do not add them.

Year / source	What was counted	Figure	Caveat
Global tech 2024, layoffs.fyi	Public tech layoff events	152,922	Tracker, not a census
Global tech 2025, layoffs.fyi	Public tech layoff events	122,606	Tracker, not a census
Global tech 2026 YTD, layoffs.fyi	Public events to mid-September	129,153	Year incomplete
TCS, July 2025 statement	Announced global release, mainly mid/senior	~12,000 (2% of 613,069)	Company statement; global, not India-only
Top-five Indian IT, FY26	Net reported headcount change	About -7,000	Mix of exits, slower hiring, attrition
Oracle India, 2026, ET	Reported India share of a 21,000 global cut	About 12,000, then ~3,000 more	India split is reported, not always filed
MNC cluster, Mint, Sep 2026	Oracle, PayPal, Amazon, Adidas, Meta in India, 12 months	12,000–15,000	Cluster estimate from dated reporting
Indian start-ups 2025, Inc42	Start-up layoffs counted by Inc42	9,500+	Methodology differs from layoffs.fyi
Indian start-ups Jan–Oct 2025, Hindu BL / layoffs.fyi	Public start-up events	4,282 across 25 firms	Public events only; 2023 comparison was 14,978

The comparison that matters for the desk is not India versus Silicon Valley. It is the people still in the building versus the people who left. Every named cut above left a remaining team. That team is the reader of this paper, whether the

reader knows it or not.

03

Why current approaches fail

Three habits keep showing up after Indian layoffs. Each one looks like leadership. Each one adds survivor load.

Silence from leadership

The all-hands happens. The slide says the firm is now leaner. Then the executive calendar closes. Nobody tells managers what to say on Wednesday when someone asks whether there is another round. Survivors watch how the cut was handled, then they watch their own job. Silence is read as concealment.

Leadership IQ's manager finding cuts the other way. Visibility, approachability and candour — including candour when the honest sentence is 'I do not know yet' — tracked with far smaller self-reported drops in productivity and quality. Absence of those three behaviours is not neutral. It is a cost.

A wellness webinar the week after

A 45-minute session on resilience, booked for Friday, delivered by a vendor who was not in the room when names came off the list, does not metabolise a cut. It tells the remaining team that the firm has ticked a box. Survivor load is a change in the work plus a change in trust. A webinar treats the second as a mood and ignores the first.

EmotionApp does not replace the conversation the manager has to have. It gives that conversation a next action that can be counted. The webinar has no next action. That is why it fails.

Managers unbriefed

Most Indian people-managers after a cut are themselves survivors. They have not been given language. So they borrow the corporate line, go quiet, or over-promise that this is the last one. All three moves raise load.

Unbriefed managers also absorb the extra work without renaming it. The missing mid-level reviewer is not replaced. The remaining senior is asked to 'stretch'. Stretch without a written boundary is how survivor load becomes attrition six months later. The protocol below briefs the manager first. The team protocol comes second.

04

The emotional-fitness model applied — the 30-day protocol

PULL QUOTE

India's employee engagement stood at 23 per cent in 2025 — seven points below the 2023 figure of 32 per cent.

Emotional fitness here means practised skills, not a personality. EmotionApp treats each skill as a rep: one action, one count, ninety seconds to a few minutes. The house line is counts, never confessions. Nothing the person writes is a clinical score. Nothing the employer sees is a health record.

The 30-day protocol borrows four weeks from that model and aims them at survivor load. Week 1 acknowledges the cut and settles the body. Week 2 reframes agency without fake gratitude. Week 3 puts meaning back on the remaining work. Week 4 rebuilds a small circle so the team is not a set of isolated desks. The named reps below mix tools that already live on emotionapp.in with three protocol labels coined for this paper.

Legal boundary, said once and kept: EmotionApp is not a clinic. It does not offer diagnosis, treatment or therapy. If a person asks for clinical help, or a coach judges that the distress is beyond coaching, the person is offered a specialised professional. Crisis support in India is available on Tele-MANAS 14416.

Week 1 — Acknowledge and settle

The first week is honest, not motivational. The manager names what happened, what is known and what is not. The team gets one body-level reset they can use at the desk.

Manager scripts

Open the first huddle with three sentences and no fourth. People have left and the work has moved. There is no dated guarantee of no further change. For 30 days we will protect output by naming load. Then take questions.

The Big Sigh Reset

Double inhale through the nose, one long exhale through the mouth, one to three times. Counts as resets plus streak. A 2023 trial in *Cell Reports Medicine* found that five minutes a day of cyclic, exhale-focused sighing improved mood and lowered respiratory rate more than a mindfulness comparison. The desk version is shorter: a down-shift, not a class.

Week 2 — Reframe

Week 2 drops the myth that remaining staff will work harder out of thanks. Insecurity does not scale effort in a straight line. Put agency back in one sentence the person can stand behind.

You Own the Comeback	One written ownership line for the next 30 days: what the remaining team will protect, and what it will not pretend. Example: we will protect Friday shipping for client X; we will not pretend the review bench is fully staffed. Counts as ownership lines written. It is a boundary, not a vision statement.
Collect the Receipts	Log one piece of evidence each day that the work still holds: a shipped ticket, a client kept, a colleague who stayed. Counts as receipts logged. After a cut the mind replays absence. Receipts force attention onto what is still true.
Week 3 — Meaning	Survivor load flattens meaning. Work becomes a list of tickets that used to have names attached. Week 3 puts one human back on one task.
Follow the Thread to Who You Help	Trace one routine task to the actual human it protects or serves. Write their name into the task. Counts as threads traced. A test case is not 'QA'. It is the engineer in Pune who will be paged if this ships broken, or the operations lead in a client bank who still has to close the day. Meaning is not a poster. It is a name.
Week 4 — Connect	Connection here is not a bonding offsite. It is two small practices that rebuild trust in the work.
Match the Firecracker	When someone shares good news, respond with energy and two genuine follow-up questions before talking about yourself. Counts as firecracker responses logged. How a person responds to good news predicts the bond better than how they respond to bad news.
Build Your Home Base	Name three people inside the remaining team. Check in twice a week for the rest of the 30 days. Not a wellness circle. A work-trust circle. Counts as home-base check-ins logged. Question: what is heavy, what shipped, what do you need from me. Supporting reps on the platform can sit under the same weeks: Name It to Frame It; Tiny Wins, Big Flywheel; Half-Won Is Still Won; The Thank-You Ambush.

05

The manager's 30-day calendar — what to say and what not to say

The say-line belongs in the room. The do-not-say line adds load. Do the action the same day.

Table 2. Days 1–7. Acknowledge and settle.

Day	Say	Do not say	Do
1	A named number of colleagues have left. The remaining work has moved to this team. I will take questions.	We are now a family. They will be fine. You should feel lucky.	One huddle. One Big Sigh Reset before it. Write the three-sentence opening. Do not add a fourth.
2	I do not have a dated guarantee there will be no further change. Here is what I do know this week.	This is definitely the last round.	Publish a one-page 'known / unknown / next review date'. Keep it to one page.
3	The extra tickets are real. We will name them before we assign them.	Everyone just needs to stretch.	List the work that arrived from empty desks. Mark what stops this week.
4	If you are carrying something that does not fit the new shape, bring it to me today.	HR will handle the feelings.	Two 20-minute one-to-ones with the people closest to those who left.
5	We are not doing a gratitude round. We are doing a load round.	At least you still have a job.	Team load board: keep / pause / drop. No more than seven items.
6	I will be at my desk at 4 p.m. if you want a short conversation. No agenda required.	My door is always open.	Be visible at a named hour. Approachability needs a time, not a slogan.
7	Week 1 was for telling the truth. Next week we write what we will protect.	By Monday we should be back to normal.	Manager writes their own ownership line first. Team sees it on Monday.

Table 3. Days 8–14. Reframe.

Day	Say	Do not say	Do
8	Write one line: what we will protect for 30 days, and what we will not pretend.	This is an opportunity.	You Own the Comeback. Collect the first receipt before noon.
9	A partial win still counts. Score yesterday 0–10, not pass or fail.	If you cared you would already be at 10.	Half-Won Is Still Won, once, in the stand-up.
10	Here is one piece of work that still held yesterday. Here is mine.	Let's not dwell.	Manager logs a public receipt. Invites two others. No pressure to perform grief.
11	If the queue is longer because people left, we will say that in the client note.	Tell the client nothing changed.	Rewrite one status update so it does not lie about capacity.
12	I still do not know X. I will know more on this date, or I will tell you that I do not.	Trust the process.	Update the known / unknown page. Leave the blanks visible.
13	Name one strength you used this week in service of a named person.	We need heroes now.	Call Out Your Own Strength, once. Keep it specific.

Day	Say	Do not say	Do
14	Week 2 closes with the ownership line on one page, signed by the manager.	We have processed this.	Read the line aloud. Do not ask the room to applaud.

Table 4. Days 15–21. Meaning.

Day	Say	Do not say	Do
15	Pick one routine task. Write the name of the human it protects.	Find your purpose.	Follow the Thread, one task each. Manager goes first.
16	If you cannot name who this helps, we should question whether we still do it.	Everything on the backlog still matters.	Drop or defer one unthreaded task.
17	The person who left used to hold this thread. Here is who holds it now.	We will not speak about people who left.	Name the hand-off without gossip and without erasure.
18	What shipped that actually protected someone this week?	Keep grinding.	Three receipts, read out, two minutes total.
19	If the work no longer has a human on the other end, bring it to me.	Just close the ticket.	One-to-ones with anyone whose thread is now blank.
20	Meaning is a name, not a slogan on the wall.	We are mission-driven.	Rewrite one ticket title so the human is visible.
21	Week 3 ends when every live workstream has a named human.	We have rebuilt culture.	Publish a one-page thread map. Keep it ugly and true.

Table 5. Days 22–30. Connect.

Day	Say	Do not say	Do
22	Name three people you will check in with twice a week. I will name mine.	We should do an offsite.	Build Your Home Base. Write the three names.
23	When someone shares a close or a clean review, match the energy. Two questions. Then your turn.	Let's not get carried away.	Match the Firecracker. Manager models it once in public.
24	Home-base check-in question: what is heavy, what shipped, what do you need.	How are you feeling, really.	Six short check-ins across the three names, this week.
25	A thank-you that names the act is useful. A thank-you that names the trauma is not required.	We're so grateful you stayed.	One Thank-You Ambush, sent, specific.
26	If you need more than coaching, say so. We will hand you to a specialised professional. That is not a mark against you.	Have you tried meditation.	Remind the room of the hand-off and of Tele-MANAS 14416.
27	We will not measure your journal. We will count reps.	Tell us how you really feel in the tool.	Show the dashboard. Show what the employer cannot see.
28	Two weeks from now I will still take the 4 p.m. hour.	Back to business as usual on day 31.	Book the next 14 days of visibility on the calendar.
29	Here is what we protected. Here is what we dropped. Here is what is still heavy.	Look how well we bounced back.	Read the 30-day scoreboard: reps, streaks, threads, home-base completion.
30	The cut happened. We did not pretend. The work still has names on it.	Closure. Fresh start. New chapter.	Close the 30 days. Keep Home Base and the Sigh Reset. Stop the theatre.

On the last day, the stand-up still closes on a long ticket queue and one empty chair. Naming that load out loud is the work.

06

Measurement — a dashboard that holds no clinical data

If the employer can read a feeling, the tool will not be used. EmotionApp counts behaviour. It does not store confessions. House line: counts, never confessions.

What the employer sees

Four numbers, refreshed weekly, never as a named person's inner life.

Rep counts. How many Big Sigh Resets, ownership lines, receipts, threads, firecracker responses and home-base check-ins were completed. Counted as actions, not as scores of wellbeing.

Streaks. How many consecutive working days a team kept a chosen rep. A streak is a habit signal. It is not a mood score.

Emotional-vocabulary breadth. From Name It to Frame It: a team-level count of distinct feeling words. The employer sees the breadth, not the words attached to a name.

Participation. Share of the remaining team and of managers who completed at least one rep in the week.

What the employer never sees

Journal text. Named feelings attached to a person. Coach-chat transcripts. Anything that could be read as a health record. Any output that looks like diagnosis, treatment or therapy. The AI coach may suggest a next rep. It may also suggest a human hand-off. The content of that conversation is not a management report.

This split is the DPDP-aligned design: India-resident data, purpose limitation, no covert scoring of distress. ISO 9001 covers delivery quality. ISO 13485 covers the discipline of a product that sits next to health-adjacent work without becoming a medical device. Counts, never confessions.

07

Implementation — a 90-day plan

Thirty days is the protocol. Ninety days is the install.

Table 7. Ninety days. Owner, action, metric.

Week	Owner	Action	Metric
0	CHRO + General Counsel	Write the legal boundary. Confirm India-resident data path, DPDP purpose limitation, and the hand-off rule. Brief Tele-MANAS 14416 into the footer of every manager note.	Signed one-page boundary
1	CEO + CHRO	Name the cut once, in the CEO's voice, with a known / unknown page. Do not outsource the first sentence to Internal Comms.	First huddle held within 48 hours of the cut
1–2	People Business Partner	Brief every people-manager on the 30-day calendar. Rehearse the say / do-not-say lines. Give managers their own Home Base of three peers.	% of managers briefed before they meet their team
1–4	Line manager	Run the calendar. Model The Big Sigh Reset, You Own the Comeback, Collect the Receipts.	Weekly participation ≥ 60% of remaining team
2–4	EmotionApp coach (AI, with human behind it)	Serve the day's rep on WhatsApp, in the person's language. Escalate to a human coach on request or on distress cues.	Rep completion; hand-off count
3–5	Engineering / People Ops	Switch on the employer dashboard: reps, streaks, breadth, participation. Lock journal and transcript access off.	Zero clinical fields in the employer view
5–8	Line manager	Keep Home Base and the Sigh Reset. Drop theatre. Update the thread map when work moves.	Home-base check-ins twice a week
6–10	CHRO	Read the dashboard with the CEO once a fortnight. Look at participation and dropped work, not at mood.	Two 20-minute reviews, minuted
8–12	CEO + CHRO	Decide keep / adapt / stop. If keeping, write the 30-day calendar into the standard playbook for any future cut.	Written decision by day 90
12	CHRO	Publish an internal note: what was counted, what was never seen, how many hand-offs, what work was dropped on purpose.	One-page close-out

WhatsApp-first delivery matters. The day's rep should land in the thread the team already uses, between the shift roster and the lunch order. English and Hindi are live; 23 Indian languages are the product claim. Offer the language the person thinks in.

08

One-page checklist the reader can run this week

Tick these this week.

1. Write the three-sentence opening. Practise it once out loud. Remove the fourth sentence.
2. Publish a one-page known / unknown / next-review-date note the same day as the cut, or the next working morning.
3. List the work that arrived from empty desks. Mark keep / pause / drop. Cap the live list at seven.
4. Brief every people-manager on visibility, approachability and candour before they meet their team.
5. Give each manager the say / do-not-say lines for days 1–7.
6. Do The Big Sigh Reset once yourself. Then use it to open one huddle.
7. Name three Home Base people for yourself. Put two check-ins in the calendar this week.
8. Write your ownership line: what the remaining team will protect, and what it will not pretend.
9. Log one receipt before noon tomorrow. Make it specific and small.
10. Trace one routine task to a named human. Write the name into the ticket.
11. State the legal boundary in the team channel: this is coaching, not diagnosis, treatment or therapy. Hand-off is available. Tele-MANAS 14416 sits in the footer.

09

FAQ

Q1 Will people who kept their jobs just work harder out of gratitude?

No. In Leadership IQ's survey of 4,172 layoff survivors, 74 per cent said their own productivity had declined. Gratitude is not a plan. A 30-day protocol is.

Q2 How bad is the trust hit after a cut?

Job insecurity correlated $-.50$ with trust across eight samples and 2,994 people in Sverke's 2002 meta-analysis. Eighty-seven per cent of Leadership IQ's survivors were less likely to recommend their organisation as a place to work.

Q3 Is this a clinical programme for layoff survivor syndrome?

No. EmotionApp does not offer diagnosis, treatment or therapy. Survivor load is a work-and-trust problem. If distress is beyond coaching, the person is handed to a specialised professional. Tele-MANAS 14416 remains the crisis line.

Q4 What should I measure so legal and the works council can live with it?

Four numbers: rep counts, streaks, emotional-vocabulary breadth, participation. Zero journal text. Zero named feelings attached to a person. That split is the DPDP-aligned design.

Q5 How long before a remaining team looks stable?

Run the protocol for 30 days. Decide at 90. Leadership IQ's manager finding is the near-term lever: high visibility, approachability and candour tracked with a 72 per cent smaller chance of a self-reported productivity drop.

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HOW TO CITE

Aswani A. The Survivor's Desk: Those who stay carry the cut. A 30-day protocol for managers and remaining teams after layoffs that protects output without pretending nothing happened.. EmotionApp White Paper 18. Mumbai: Tranquilo Meditek Sytems Private Limited; 2026. <https://emotionapp.in/research/the-survivors-desk>

LAST UPDATED

Last updated: 22 September 2026

NOTE

EmotionApp is a non-clinical emotional-fitness coaching platform. This paper describes practices, techniques and coaching. It is not therapy, treatment, diagnosis or medical advice.

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