

You're Unemployed – Now What?

By Deborah Noel

Although most of us won't be in the boardroom hearing Donald Trump say those (trademarked) infamous words "You're Fired!" – at some point in our lives many of us will be either fired, downsized, made redundant, let go, given the pink slip, dismissed, or laid-off. Whatever the words used, the feelings remain the same. Most of us will feel terrified, overwhelmed, scared, unhappy and confused. The big question ... now what?

***GATHER YOUR RESOURCES.* Make sure you get a copy of your Record of Employment (often called an ROE). Even if you are sure that you do not have enough hours to qualify for EI, hours can accumulate and they may make a difference later. Should you have a problem getting your ROE still apply for EI anyway and ask the people at Human Resources Development Canada for assistance. You have a right to this document. Companies often move or go out of business, so, if possible, get a written reference letter. This solves the problem of having to provide a phone number, which may change, and you also get an idea of what your reference will look like.**

By using the services of "211" or "211toronto.ca" you can find out where the closest Employment Resource Centre is closest to you. Employment Resource Centres are free and you can access computers, fax machines, job search workshops and trained staff to help you.. Take advantage of resume and cover letter assistance. There is a science to job searching and information is constantly being updated. If you have access to the Internet you can also use www.poss.ca. Poss.ca is a virtual resource center and has the most up-to-date links to workshops, training and an online employment counselor (Ask Susan).

Check your credit cards, mortgage and insurance policies. You may have "loss of salary" insurance on these. Also, many services offer reduced rates for low income. Toronto District School Board and Toronto Parks and Recreation have policies that offer reduced rates for low income. This is also a good time to check out low cost options which you may not have considered before. Information on this can be found on the website www.poss.ca - community resources.

WEIGH YOUR OPTIONS – Are you eligible for Employment Insurance, training funds or severance pay? Were you dismissed unfairly or was it a constructive dismissal? Might there possibly be other monies owing to you? If you have received Employment Insurance in the past three years (five years if it was a maternity leave) you may be eligible for “reach-back training funds”. To ensure that your lay-off was handled in a legal and fair manner, speak to a legal expert. You can find out where your closest legal clinic is, again, by calling 211. Remember, if you were treated fairly, don’t burn your bridges behind you. You may need to use your last employer for a reference or may even be called to work again. Chances are if you were a valuable employee, your employer only let you go as a last resort.

GATHER A SUPPORT GROUP – You have all heard about networking. You will be hearing it a lot while you are unemployed, and for good reason. The best job searchers are often the best networkers. Don’t be afraid to let people know that you are unemployed. Most people will experience unemployment in their lives. Visit the Employment Resource Centre, attend workshops and pass out your Calling Card (you can get a template for a calling card on www.poss.ca - toolkits). Don’t hesitate to join or participate in trade organizations for your particular field or attend your local BIA, Rotary or Kinsmen meetings. The more people who know who you are, the more people you have looking for you. Don’t forget to keep track of your contacts (*and every person you meet is a potential contact!*) and to thank them for their assistance.

KEEP TO A SCHEDULE – One of the biggest downfalls I often see in job searchers is not knowing when to stop. Establishing a job search schedule and sticking to it is a strong indicator of success. Start job searching at 9 and stop job searching at 5. Doing otherwise often leads to late nights, insomnia and, in many cases, depression. Make sure you go to bed at a regular hour and continue to spend time with your friends and family. It is more important to do an effective, well-planned job search than to just apply for every single job that you see. As on the job, working smart is often more important than just working hard.

VOLUNTEER – Don’t volunteer just because it is a good thing to do. Volunteering allows you an opportunity to keep your skills up to

date, learn new skills and network with the community. Volunteering also allows you to feel active and involved in your community and connected. A devastating side effect of unemployment is often isolation. Volunteering gives you a chance to contribute and keep your skills fresh. Many people often report that they have secured employment through their volunteering efforts although this is not a guarantee. Two good websites to find volunteer work are; www.volrap.org and www.charityvillage.com.

THE POWER IS YOURS! – You do have control here. You also have decisions to make – what do you want to do next and where do you want to do it. Perhaps now is the time to make a career change. Look at your transferable skills. Do you want to go back to your old line of work or do you need retraining. If, in your old job, you were commuting and unhappy about it, this may be the chance to find work closer to home. One sure way to ensure job failure is to take any job offered. A good job, like a good marriage, has to fit. You must share the same values, expectations and goals. Although, economics may force you to take a survival or contingent position, your next “real” job should be one where all the factors have been weighed and chosen carefully. When going on job interviews don’t forget to research the company carefully and ask questions. You will not only make a favorable impression on your employer but if a job offer is forthcoming, you will be more confident about your decision.

REMEMBER – ITS NOT WHAT YOU ARE BUT WHO YOU ARE. I have met thousands of job seekers and see a similar pattern. Many job seekers have identified themselves so strongly with their job title that when they lose the title they don’t know who they are. This often leads to anxiety, depression and isolation. In actual fact, you are the same person as you were before you started the job and whom you will be when you retire. Your job is really only what we do to ensure that we can lead the rest of our lives – we are also parents, spouses, friends, daughters, sons, aunts and uncles. We go to movies, play sports, volunteer and participate in the real world. Quite often, the only person to whom your title mattered to was yourself! (Shocking, but it is true). It is more important than ever, while you are unemployed, to be aware of current events, stay connected with your family and get involved with the community.

As the old saying goes, “when one door closes another one opens”. I know, I know.... you don’t need platitudes at a time like this. However, if you take the right approach, unemployment can be a life changing, liberating experience which, in retrospect, may be the best thing to ever happen to you. There has never been a better time to be out of work. Our economy is doing well and there are many support systems in the Greater Toronto Area to assist you in finding your next job. Who knows – your next job may be as Donald Trumps “Apprentice”!

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