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Experts Offer Advice To Unemployed In Tough Job Market - Part Two

Experts Offer Advice to Unemployed in Tough Job Market - Part Two

By Heather O'Neill
November 17, 2009

Whether you are a recent graduate, between jobs because of a layoff, or reentering the workforce after taking time off to be a stay-at-home mom, these are tough times to be looking for work.

While the busywork of unemployment--like rewriting resumes, learning to use social networking sites, and finding productive uses of your time--can be strenuous, the emotional toll a period of unemployment takes is sometimes even harder.

In [Part One](#) of this article, you can find practical tips for cleaning house, from creating an unemployment budget to polishing your resume and online image.

In this second part of this article, experts share their advice for staying positive, upbeat and sharp during a job search.

Use the Buddy System

If you are lacking motivation or feeling shy, sometimes a buddy can lift you out of your funk.

Frances Cole Jones, author of *The Wow Factor; The 33 Things You Must (and Must Not) Do to Guarantee Your Edge in Today's Business World*, highly recommends job seekers adopt a buddy system, both for moral support and results.

"Fitness programs have shown that making a plan to meet someone at the gym ensures you get to the gym," she said. "Similarly, making a plan to meet someone at a networking event will ensure you make it out the door."

To really get a fire under your job search, find a dedicated "action partner," Joyce K. Reynolds advises. This person should be willing to encourage you when you feel stalled, prod you when you are out of gas and be a source of "relentless positive, just-take-the-next-step" energy, she said.

A buddy system is helping in creating what David Perry, principal of [Perry-Martel International](#), calls "personal leverage." So what is personal leverage?

"Personal leverage is a constraint that makes backing away [from your intent] much more difficult... like an engagement ring if you're thinking about getting hitched," Perry said. "It's a public admission that you're going to do something, knowing that if you fail you'll be [held accountable]. Leverage may be the best way to overcome psychological barriers that prevent you from staying focused. There are many different ways you can create leverage. Start by defining your motivation for achieving your goals: if you can define the reason to achieve a goal, you will be much more committed to it. You need to know what's driving you to make it happen."

Think Outside the Box

Being out of work means that you have some extra time on your hands to market yourself in ways that might have been too labor intensive if you were employed. But outside of the traditional resume and cover letter, how you can differentiate yourself from the competition?

When she was out of work, Andrea Sittig-Rolf decided that self-promotion was the only way that she would get noticed so in her spare time she created an "Accomplishments Portfolio."

Sittig-Rolf's "Accomplishments Portfolio" was a 3-ring binder made up not just of her resume and experience, but testimonials from her previous employers, thank you notes from former customers, and any other accolades she could find about her performance in her past job. She also included projects she had done for previous employers that positively impacted the company's bottom line and shipped the entire package off via FedEx to a company she was interested in working for.

"Companies hiring now want results," Sittig-Rolf said. "They don't just want to know what applicants' tasks and duties were in their previous jobs, but what bottom line results they created, and the creative projects they were a part of. Job seekers need to set themselves apart from everyone else applying for the same job and creating an Accomplishments Portfolio, as I did, is a great way to do that."

For Sittig-Rolf it paid off handsomely: "[The company's VP and I] later had lunch together and it was my first, and only, experience with a potential employer sliding a napkin over to me with a dollar amount on it representing an annual salary. I had to keep my cool and not let my jaw hit the floor when I realized it was twice the salary I had been making!"


Sittig-Rolf, an accomplished business author, is currently writing a book about her experience, "Rev Your Resume," which is being published by Thomson Reuters.


This exercise may do more than make you stand out from the crowd in the eyes of a potential employer. Laying out evidence of your past achievements will remind you that you have had professional success in the past and that you will have that kind of success again in the future.


Follow Your Passion


When Bob Johnson lost his job in 2008 he was under no illusions that his search for a new position would be easy but he found a way to maintain his good humor during the search.


"When I started my job search, I knew the job market wasn't very good," Johnson recalled. "I could

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have decided to keep on looking for work on the Internet, or curled up in the fetal position while watching episodes of Oprah. Instead, I decided to pursue two of my passions: photography and video."

Johnson received an SLR camera for his birthday that year and also purchased an inexpensive camcorder. Since then, he has been spending my free time taking photographs and making videos. He created a [blog](#) and his photography has since appeared in The New York Times, The Star magazine, TMZ and, also BroadwaySpace.com.

"A lot of the photography and video stuff I am doing is strictly for my passion but, along the way, I managed to pick up some freelance work (although not full-time nor enough money to pay my bills) and have added that freelance work to my resume," he said. "Although I haven't been in the workforce for almost two years now, I am hoping that this will help keep me viable in the job market."

According to Joyce K. Reynolds, this is great advice regardless of whether you wind up being paid for your work. She reminds her clients regularly of the importance of planning a full day a week to "adventure."

"For the full-time job seeker, it is imperative to get relief from the fear and stress of being unemployed," she said. "Therefore, setting aside a planned day to support a passion or hobby or do things that could not be enjoyed if one were employed can provide enormous benefits."

Stay Mentally and Physically Fit

David Perry minces no words when he talks to his clients about the benefits of staying physically fit during a job search: do it like it is your part time job.

"Exercise every freaking day," he said. "You're used to being in an office and the daily interaction that goes with it.. When you're job hunting you need to create that atmosphere for yourself or risk depression. And it should be done at the same time every day. No excuses! Pump up your endorphins first thing in the morning and you'll soar through the day!"

Other experts agree and some add that surrounding yourself with supportive friends with whom you can commiserate or seeking the advice of a licensed therapist can combat the blues and bruised ego that so often accompany a stint of unemployment.

Count Your Blessings

To that end, Marcia LaReau, President, Forward Motion, believes that avoiding "negative mental traffic" is key to a successful period of unemployment. Instead of wallowing in negative thoughts, try to find the bright side of unemployment.

"Be there for your family," LaReau said. "This could be the banner season for the family: the one season where mom or dad doesn't miss a swim meet, a band concert, or whatever [Unemployment is] a rare opportunity for bonding with children. Get those things done around the house that there was never time for because of work: Clean the garage, organize the basement, put the CDs in a database. [Or spend your time] volunteering with youth. It only takes one adult to believe in an at-risk youth to change the direction of that young person."

Tammy Kabell, a career strategist, job search coach and owner of [Career Resume Consulting](#), agrees:

"If I had just one piece of advice, it would be gratitude, gratitude, gratitude," she said. "It's so easy to focus on the negatives of unemployment that we sometimes forget the positives."

Kabell recommends that her clients write a list of all of the good things to come out of unemployment answering questions like, do you now have more time to spend with your family? Are there books you've purchased but never had the time to read? Could you take advantage of this time to reflect on what type of job you really want to do rather than just what earns the next paycheck? And she reminds her clients that one blessing unemployment bestows is having more time to devote to finding the right job than someone who is employed.

"Time is your friend in that respect, she said. "So make a list of all the good things, even the little ones, that have come out of unemployment, and refer back to that list when you feel frustrated or down."