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# JOB LOSS

## *Cashing Your Reality Cheque*

Each night for weeks, prior to his interview at the police services recruitment centre, Jeremy carefully wrapped weights around his neck and then hung upside down from a bar. His persistence paid off because he succeeded in stretching a full inch to meet the minimum height requirement — but at what risk to his health?

Trying to land a job can make us do some crazy things, but job hunting today is tough. Dana, a career counselor explains, “Twenty years ago, you put in an application and got hired the next day. Now you have behavioral interviews, targeted resumes, cover letters and the Internet.” Looking for a job is a job in itself.

John, an employment counselor says when the reality of job loss hits, “most people are running as fast as they can to stay still and aren’t open to advice until the point when they realize, this is basically as bad as it’s going to get and I’m surviving.” This tipping point occurs when a ray of hope cracks the emotional darkness and life takes a new direction.

Mobilizing resources begins with a survey: Who are you? What do like and dislike? Who do you know? Where can you access help? It may include re-defining the job loss in a way to work to your benefit. Losing a

job may mean temporary unemployment, but it may also be a perfect opportunity to change careers, go back to school or even travel. Mary lost her job of 40 years in a plant closure and now manages an Action Centre. She says ask yourself, “What do I really love to do? ...And if it’s gardening, go work in a greenhouse. Sometimes it’s just that simple.” When Horst was downsized, he accepted a training package—it took him three years, but he’s now a paramedic.

Once on the road to transition, we must decide our destination. What would it take to switch careers or industries, improve your skills or learn new ones, or perhaps relocate? As an employment counselor, John says his role is to help people gain insight and move forward. As well he recommends job hunting clubs, where members support and encourage each other. The group experience he says can be “in some ways, a lot more powerful than one-on-one counseling.”

The actual job search is the biggest hurdle to landing a job, says John. Regard a resume as simply an advertisement to interest an employer in finding out more. “The 800 pound gorilla is cold calling. We talk of the 80/20 rule, that 80 per cent of the jobs are not posted anywhere, they are hidden. The way to access those hidden jobs is by networking, by phone calling, by talking to people you don’t know. The job search is a selling process. It’s all about developing a relationship with the people who have the ability to help you.”

For displaced long-time manufacturing workers, used to meeting someone else’s goals and objectives, the transition to a personal focus can be unsettling. People who’ve invested years in ongoing education may feel, “after all the time and effort I’ve put into learning, why don’t employers see what I have to offer?” One strategy is to ask for advice, not “Are you hiring?” According to John this “...is much more powerful because it is far easier for people to say yes...” so ask them questions that will prompt a ‘yes’ answer.

And says Mary, “The next time you say ‘I would love to do that’ write it down. Then go back and see what you can do about it.”

*Names have been changed to protect the privacy of the interviewees.*

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### Keeping Perspective

#### **Get Real About Money.**

Action takes the edge off fear and anxiety. Be proactive and seek credit counselling at the start, not if you get desperate. Go together if you have a partner.

#### **Remain Optimistic.**

The positive feedback and sense of accomplishment found in work disappear with a job loss. A mentor, partner or other trusted family member can replace some of those good feelings by staying positive about the job seeker’s prospects.

#### **Keep Blowing Some Cash.**

It may seem prudent to curtail all pleasure spending, but feeling deprived can be a nasty source of family tension. Keep some splurges; cut the ones you won’t miss and scale others down. Trim with a scalpel, not a cleaver.