

SURVIVING UNEMPLOYMENT

By Sue Montgomery, CPRW, IJCTC

As recently as last spring, most of the clients I served as a résumé writer and career coach were already in the workforce. They were simply pursuing transition to other jobs within their current company, changing employers, or switching careers. Whatever the reason, it was THEIR CHOICE to make a move.

Now, however, my client base is comprised of more and more people who have been downsized, right-sized, pink-slipped, reduced-in-force, or otherwise driven to the growing ranks of the unemployed. For many of them, it's the first time they've had to look for a job in over 20 years.

Almost without exception, the first question I am asked by these clients is, "What's the job market like right now?" Where have they been?! Anyone who tunes in to television and radio talk shows, listens to the nightly news, reads a newspaper or magazine, or eavesdrops in the checkout line at the super market MUST have heard that it's a tough employment market out there. And it's expected to get tougher.

If you are one of the growing number of people who suddenly find themselves without a job, by now you may be asking, "Is finding a new position hopeless? Should I just sign up for unemployment, and wait until things get better out there?" Not at all. You CAN find a new job, but it won't be easy.

The obvious place to start is by updating your résumé. Because, when an opportunity presents itself, you had better be ready.

In addition to making sure your résumé is current, pay close attention to how it is formatted; it needs to be an attention-grabber. Be certain that it incorporates the right key words for your industry, and that it highlights the qualifications that will be of most interest to the potential employer. But don't stop there.

Every résumé you send should be accompanied by a well-written cover letter. This document is the professional touch that tells the reader you have your act together. But there's another step that must also be taken.

Each résumé and cover letter needs to be CUSTOMIZED for every prospect. This means that you must know what credentials a specific employer seeks in the right candidate. Then, be sure the first thing the hiring manager sees when he or she begins reading your cover letter and résumé, is that you meet these all-important criteria. A word of caution: Never falsify your credentials. Remember that you must live up to any skills, training, education and achievements that are listed on your résumé.

How can you learn what each employer wants? Do your homework.

If you are replying to a *Classified* advertisement, read it carefully, and highlight each key qualification. Then address them all in your cover letter and résumé.

If responding to an Internet posting, do the same thing. If networking through friends and associates, or directly contacting a company, ask if you can get a written job description. If none of this is possible, try to get a job description for a similar position within another company. Friends and associates are a great source for getting this information.

Next month, I'll talk about more ways to find new professional opportunities in a tight employment market.