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June 2001

Hard Times, Smart Strategies: 89 Ways to Stay Fast During a Slowdown

by Fast Company

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Since the NASDAQ first hit the skids last April, the U.S. economy has been on a gut-wrenching roller-coaster ride, with the occasional high giving way to one heart-stopping plunge after another.

As once high-flying companies announce missed earnings, and tech-sector gold standards begin to falter, the human toll of an economic retrenchment is quickly becoming apparent.

If you haven't been the unlucky recipient of a pink slip yourself, you've likely watched friends and coworkers unwillingly join the ranks of the downsized.

That is why Fast Company has assembled this layoff series -- to provide guidance, support, and even the occasional, rueful laugh during this tough economic shift. As the week progresses, you will find advice and counsel from the nation's most experienced executive recruiters, job-hunting tips from counselors in the trenches, career alternatives from a sabbatical proponent,

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and countless other resources designed to help you weather this economic storm and emerge, we hope, better in the end.

1 - 10

[10 Truths About Layoffs...](#)

...that your father never told you. Truth #1: There are worse things than losing a job -- like staying in a bad job for "security." *Linda Tischler*

11 - 20

[Smart Ways to Land Your Next Gig](#)

The good news: You've found a good job in a company that's built to last. The bad news: Lots of others are jockeying for the same position. Here are strategies to help you stand apart while everyone else is standing around. *Jennifer Reingola*

21 - 25

[How to Move Forward When You're Between Jobs](#)

Learn how to transform a layoff into a savvy sabbatical -- a time to recharge your batteries and learn new skills without sabotaging your résumé. Author Hope Dlugozima offers tips for taking six months off smart. *Anni Layne*

26 - 35

[Get Lost](#)

Don't just sit there -- consider these 10 sabbaticals selected by the Fast Company staff, then steal them, tweak them, and pass them on. *Anni Layne and Christine Engelken*

36 - 43

[What Counts in a Job Now](#)

Forget promises of stock options, foosball tables, and free breakfast buffets. Today's job seekers want more meaningful rewards, like challenging work, skilled managers -- and cash. *Jennifer Reingold*

44

[Memo to Self: Take a Hike!](#)

How one vice president at Altrec.com helped save the company by downsizing his own job. A layoff saga with a hopeful twist. *Anni Layne*

45 - 54

[Take This Job and Click It](#)

The following list of Web sites was handpicked by Fast Company to aid the recently unemployed in their search for work, contacts, and a shoulder to cry

**THE FUTURE
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on. *Cecilia Rothenberger and Christine Engelken*

55 - 59

[In the Form of a Question](#)

Discover potential career ideas, personal leadership strengths, and "Star Wars" characters you most resemble using these online quizzes. Are you in touch with your inner Chewbacca? Find out here. *Christine Engelken*

60 - 79

[Read Between the \(Unemployment \) Lines](#)

Help for the frustrated, frazzled, and fired has never been more readily available ... or more overwhelming. That's why Fast Company has compiled these book recommendations from four highly regarded career experts. *Anni Layne*

80 - 84

[Pink-Slip Blues](#)

The psychological repercussions of layoffs may sabotage downsized employees, survivors, and companies for years after a cutback, says author Ruth Luban. Here, she offers tips for softening the emotional blows of a pink slip. *Anni Layne*

85-89

[How to Mend Your Parachute](#)

Like many things, the notion of career planning and job hunting has changed dramatically since September 11. Here, acclaimed author Richard Bolles offers five strategies for finding meaningful work in the face of an economic recession and a national crisis. *Anni Layne Rodgers*

[More or Less](#)

Our Web-exclusive series about layoffs provoked harrowing anecdotes, harsh criticism, and hard-boiled advice from readers who debated the realities and opportunities of today and offered alternative solutions for tomorrow.

[20 \(More \) Ways to Slow Down Smart](#)

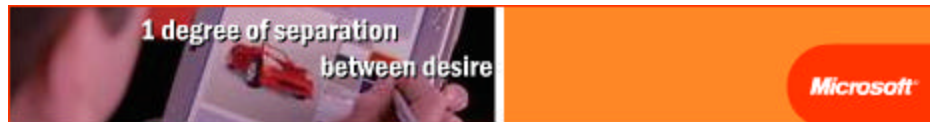
Fast Company's Lap(top) of Luxury contest prompted an outpouring of ideas from readers about how to cope with tougher times. Read their strategies and tactics, along with some compelling personal stories -- and meet the winner of a Dell Inspiron 4000 Notebook computer.

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10 Hard Truths About Layoffs

THEMES



Who ever imagined that change-the-world companies like Cisco, Dell, and Hewlett-Packard would be laying off thousands of workers? And who thought that you would be among them -- or worried that you might be next? Here's a personal survival guide for tough times.

by Linda Tischler

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Many things about the dotcom boom were, in retrospect, obviously unsustainable: absurd stock-market valuations, 24-year-old CEOs, dogs in the office, investment bankers clad in khakis. But perhaps nothing was quite as surreal as the white-hot condition of the labor market. Talk about bargaining power! Freshly minted college grads of no particular distinction

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commanded salaries that their parents worked a lifetime to achieve. Run-of-the-mill software developers were hotter than first-round NBA draft picks. And the biggest challenge facing an aspiring "biz dev" wizard was deciding which of several competing offers was most likely to end in a Porsche Boxster.

In case you hadn't noticed, the party's over. In the first five months of this year, U.S. companies cut 652,410 jobs -- 38,650 more than in all of 2000, says John A. Challenger, CEO of the international outplacement firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas. Some 41% of those cuts have come from the technology and electronics sector, he adds. And we're not just talking about lousy companies. Some of the best-known, most highly respected companies in the world -- companies that we've celebrated in the pages of Fast Company -- are cutting jobs by the thousands, even the tens of thousands. Cisco. Intel. Dell. Hewlett-Packard. They are the great names of the new economy -- and their plans for the future seem to involve getting there with fewer people.

Which brings us to the topic that we plan to explore all week: How does a smart person with big career ambitions adapt to the drastic changes in the labor market and retool for the challenges ahead? How do you respond to the new era of downsizing without downsizing your dreams? We begin with some tough love -- a collection of lessons that aren't always pleasant to hear, but which we think will prepare you for the challenging months ahead. We talked to CEOs of major corporations and executive recruiters at some of the nation's top search and outplacement firms. We've distilled their insights into a short, unsparring -- but not unhelpful -- list of 10 hard truths about layoffs that your father, your college recruiter, and your local HR representative likely never told you.

But don't forget the most important lesson of all. Markets go up, and markets go down. Digital technologies catch fire and then burn out. But through it all, the defining truth of the business world is that people are still front and center. If you're a talented person with a real passion for your work, you are living

reckons with what has changed in the world of careers -- and what hasn't.

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This job is over! But before you head off to make a fresh start, you need to make a smart finish.

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in the right times -- layoffs or not.

1. There are worse things than being laid off -- like staying in a bad job for "security."

For the past five years, everybody's had the same dream: to find work that doesn't feel like work, where every day is a new challenge, where what you do really matters to your company -- and to you. In a period of economic doldrums, it's natural to let that dream fade -- to hang by your bloody fingernails to the edge of your desktop, even if the job you're holding doesn't pass your personal desirability test.

But is that really how you want to spend your days? Is downsizing your ambitions the right way to respond to a downturn? It's true that good jobs are harder to find now, and nasty things like mortgage payments and phone bills conspire to make chucking it all unrealistic. But the soul-deadening effects of a bad job reverberate far beyond the 40 hours you spend grinding through the workday.

So, if you're in a crummy job, don't give into the temptation to just keep toughing it out because it's safe. And if you've been "downsized," don't rush to settle for the first job that comes your way. One of the new realities of the next economy is that a patchy résumé is no longer considered cool, says Philip D. Simshauser, president of the Center for Executive Options at the outplacement firm Drake Beam Morin. "Job-hopping used to be about chasing growth or following technology," he says. "But now, saying you've only been at a job for a couple of months because you made a dumb decision doesn't play well. Having multiple short jobs on your résumé damages your credentials."

So be sure your next move is to a place where you're likely to stay a while. And if it takes a little longer to find that job, so be it. Make sure that when you next hear "Welcome aboard!", your first reaction won't be to run for the gangplank.

2. In fact, losing your job may be the best career move you'll ever make.

Let's not be Pollyannaish about being laid off. Being out of work is no picnic, especially in such trying times. But if the Internet economy lured you into a job that wasn't really such a great fit, now may be a good time to rethink what you originally planned to do with your life.

"Layoffs provide a good time for reflection, a time to rethink who gets the privilege of having you work for them," says Rayona Sharpnack, founder and president of the Institute for Women's Leadership. "So don't frame the event as a personal failure. Losing a job doesn't make you a ne'er-do-well or a throwaway. Make yourself a promise that this time, you're going to find work that fits your terms. Ask yourself this: As the architect of your own life, as the creator of your own future, what are the criteria that you have for who gets the privilege of having you? That's a totally different -- and healthier -- mind-set."

A side note: Challenger says that opportunities still abound in the education, health-care, and energy industries -- none of which depends on the sale of banner advertising for revenue. Think outside the employment box. There are plenty of appealing options in less-hyped industries.

3. But don't be surprised if you are unemployed longer than you expected at first ...

Data on length of job search is contradictory: One study by Challenger, Gray & Christmas says that the first quarter of 2001 had the shortest median job-search time -- just 2.27 months -- in the firm's 15 years of tracking this index. But a more recent study by Drake Beam Morin says that the median length of time it takes to land a new job is starting to rise. Drake Beam Morin's data says that the average job search now clocks in at between 3 and 4 months, depending on industry and position.

Companies are taking longer to fill positions. Or they're postponing expansion plans that would have created new jobs.

Bottom line: The days when you could post your résumé on a Web site, or tell a few friends you were in the market, and then sit back to wait for the offers to pour in are gone. So you may want to reconsider blowing your entire severance on a two-month trip to Europe. Tuck some in the mattress for rent should the search prove more arduous than anticipated.

4. ... Even though it often pays off to move fast.

After a couple of years spent working 24-7, it's tempting to wait out the downturn with a well-deserved break. Travel a little. Catch up on your reading. Get your head together. But, our sources say, you do so at your own risk. Nobody's predicting a turnaround before the fourth quarter, and some industry veterans who have lived through previous corrections are downright gloomy about prospects for a robust recovery before early next year.

Their advice? Get out on the street, and do it fast. "Don't take the summer off," says Challenger. "Don't go on sabbatical. The unemployment rate is still only 4.4%, but it may get worse. In 1982, it was more than double that. Move while there's still some luster on your résumé."

5. By the way, the Internet won't necessarily solve your job-search problem.

If you think moving fast means posting your résumé on the Net and spamming prospective employers with email, you're living in the past. That strategy is so 1999. For all the Internet's wonders, the Net still can't touch person-to-person networking when it comes to finding good jobs.

In 2000, the vast majority of Drake Beam Morin clients -- 61% of them -- found new positions through networking, while only 6% found them through online job searches. Keep in mind, Simshauser says, that this not a paper process -- it's a people process.

So spend the evening doing your research or surfing the job boards. But spend your days out of the house. Go to professional meetings. Join organizations. Get involved in local government or volunteer work. Even pink-slip parties are worth a look since they're filled with fellow job seekers who may turn up leads that are better suited to your skills than theirs. "This is still a world where the best way to convey who you are is through somebody else's recommendation," says Simshauser.

6. You might have to settle for less money too.

Remember those giddy days when employers were forking over signing bonuses, paying bounties, and promising rafts of options to everyone from the CFO to the office admin? We regret to say that those days vanished along with record highs on the NASDAQ. Drake Beam Morin's Simshauser says that the offers he's been seeing are flat. "The high salaries have gone back to their old-economy standards," he says. "There's still a premium for good people at all levels, but right now, there are a lot of good people in the market."

The good news? Many companies are offering more cash and less equity. Two years ago, that policy would have been a deal breaker. Today, it just makes sense. You can't pay the electric bill with underwater Yahoo! options.

7. And you might find yourself at a more conservative company.

Suddenly, those old-fogy companies with org charts, dress codes, and silver-

haired CEOs are looking a little more attractive. Have they gotten sexier, or is it just their earnings statements that have a certain pheromonal appeal? Our sources tell us that even some new-economy diehards are now open to overtures from the larger, more-established companies they once spurned.

"Candidates who dismissed old-economy companies as not being exciting enough now place higher value on stability and a big paycheck," says Marc D. Lewis, managing director of the technology and venture practice at the executive-recruiting firm Christian & Timbers.

This is not to say that everybody's going to work for insurance firms and machine-tool manufacturers -- although there's nothing wrong with that. But even the hottest CEO candidates are being downright fussy about their next gig, veering away from companies whose ideas may be promising but whose funding may be dicey, to those whose prospects seem more secure. And many are opting for Global 1,000 companies, where they can apply their Internet experience within the enterprise, but without the constant pressure to achieve profitability.

Challenger suggests that job applicants lose their new-economy arrogance. "Don't reject a company out of hand because it doesn't have the appearance of the dotcom culture," he says. "You can find pockets of excellence in many companies."

8. You may also have to consider a different city.

Remember the old real-estate mantra, "Location, location, location"? Same thing's true in the job market. For the past five years, the Bay Area has been as potent a magnet as Haight-Ashbury in the Summer of Love. But the dotcom debacle, coupled with a cost of living predicated on a healthy market for IPOs, has had a drastic effect on the city's workforce.

"California seems to have been hit by an earthquake," says Lewis. "The number of people pulling the rip cord and trying to get out is gargantuan." Data from U-Haul's Mountain View office in Silicon Valley indicates that from December 2000 through February 2001, some 43% more families left the region than entered. That's compared with only 7.5% for the first half of 2000.

Where are they heading? Challenger says that Houston, with its energy businesses, is hot again. Charlotte, North Carolina is still healthy, with its combination of high-tech and banking. And overall, the Northeast, which has more medium- and large-sized companies and a more diversified base, seems

to be holding up better than some other regions, according to Lewis.

9. For all the turmoil, never forget that your professional life span is longer than that of most companies.

Still, maybe the thought of going to work for a large conglomerate in Chicago or Dallas just isn't doing it for you. Maybe a layoff is a way of telling you that you were never meant to work for a big company. Consider working for yourself. Then all staffing decisions will be yours and yours alone. And besides, you're likely to be around longer than Napster, Netscape, or Megagigabyte.com anyway. "Free agency is often a better place from which to weather a bad economy, since your future is not lashed to one company or to one big client," says Dan Pink, author of *Free Agent Nation*. "When a company has layoffs, a lot of people think that they're better off buckling down and doing twice the work, but it's a fool's bargain. As a free agent, if one of five clients disappears, you can weather it.

Pink notes that the fundamental unit of business is still the individual. "There is a fairly sizable change in human longevity versus organizational longevity. Think about Netscape. It's unlikely that Netscape will exist in 10 years. But most people will. I'd put money on me over any company in the S&P 500. I'm not going to be acquired."

10. So your real job is to find what you love and then find a way to do it. (Return to point 1.)

Ultimately, your goal should be not just to find another job but to find work that feeds your soul -- no matter the business climate, the state of the Dow, or the mood of Alan Greenspan. And that's the real truth.

Linda Tischler (ltischler@fastcompany.com) is the Fast Company managing editor of new media.

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Smart Ways to Land Your Next Gig



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by Jennifer Reingold

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It's a Wednesday night late in May at New York hot spot Hush, and the place is jumping. Not because of the uneven "dot-comedy" performances taking place in the back room, or the band playing the top-10 layoff songs (People's Choice Award: ["It's the End of the World As We Know It."](#) by R.E.M.), or even the \$3 beer specials.

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RISK-FREE ISSUE

The place is rocking because somewhere, hidden amid the strobe lights and booming bass, there are jobs to be had. It's the monthly pink-slip party, and clutches of people wearing neon-pink bracelets are swarming around the few folks wearing green ones. The green braceleteers are recruiters or people with a job to offer, and the pink-wearing ones need jobs. As you might imagine, pinks far outnumber greens these days. And judging from the aggressive bumping and jostling of the job seekers as they gather around the recruiters, they've ripped off their rose-colored shades and are here to do business.

Yep, it's a jungle out there -- but there are still good jobs available. And if you've finally identified your dream job at a company with staying power, what do you have to do to stand out in a throng of pink-bracelet wearers? We consulted with recruiters, successful job-getters, and career specialists, and culled their suggestions to come up with the top-10 ways to help you land the gig you want.

1. You create the network.

Most successful job seekers land their dream jobs through contacts that they've previously made and assiduously kept up. Susan McPherson, regional vice president at Vocus Inc., a public relations management software company, got her last several jobs through contacts and says that she doesn't understand why people don't go the extra mile to stay in touch -- particularly when they're *not* looking for a job. "The main thing is not burning bridges," she says. After she left PR Newswire in 1997 after 8 years with the company, she made it a point to stop by the local PRN staffer's office for a meeting or a quick lunch whenever she traveled on business for her new job. She also clipped relevant newspaper articles and sent them to people in her network who might be interested. All that networking paid off: When she heard about the job at Vocus, she quickly realized that the company had a potential partnership with PR Newswire -- and her former contacts spoke highly of her. "It's all part of

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Two words business owners fear:

Missed opportunity.

how you remain successful," she says.

But what if you've just learned of a great job at a company where you don't know a soul? You're just not going about it in the right way, says Beverly Kaye, founder and CEO of Career Systems International, a talent retention and development company and coauthor of the book *Love 'Em or Lose 'Em: Getting Good People to Stay* (Berrett-Koehler, 1999). "People who say, 'Gosh, I don't know anyone' are not thinking about the six degrees of separation." Once you've identified a contact who knows somebody at the company, ask him what it's like to work there and for names of people in the department you're targeting. Talk to as many people as possible. The result? The more people you get buzzing about you by the time you go in for the interview, the more it will seem like destiny that you work there.

When Amy Lambo lost her job at [workingwoman.com](http://www.workingwoman.com), the first thing she did was buy a three-ring binder to plan out her network strategy. "I started taking notes about people I might call. I called key people who I knew respected my work or friends who I knew would lend advice or help out." One of those calls led her to a job opening at John Wiley & Sons, where she now works as a Web producer.

2. Stay out of the trash can.

Dave Opton, founder and CEO of ExecuNet, an online career-management network devoted to people earning more than \$100,000, says that, on average, people spend a *total* of 15 to 20 seconds on every résumé and cover letter that they see. If they're staring at a stack of 300 of résumés and cover letters, it's likely to be even less. Their primary goal at that point is to eliminate as many as possible as quickly as possible. That means you've got very, very little time in which to avoid the garbage bin. The best way to do that, says Opton, is having a clean, two-page, chronologically organized résumé with plenty of white space and a short, to-the-point cover letter. You should include some of what Opton calls "scope data" -- important quantifiable data and discrete facts that tell the person doing the hiring how you can make his company better. But don't yammer on too long: Too much clutter is exhausting for someone who's halfway through the stack. "The biggest mistake job seekers make is writing a too-long cover letter," says Opton. "The goal of a cover letter is for potential employers to put your résumé into Pile B."

3. Don't blow it before you get started.

Sad but true fact: Many people interviewing today still don't act or look presentable, says Opton. Does that mean wear a suit? It might -- but the onus is on you, the job seeker, to find out the dress code at a company and to dress and act accordingly. "You need to look the part," says Opton. "Figure out whom you're going to see, and determine the style most important to that person." That is particularly important if you're going from a dotcom to a larger company, says Allison Hemming, president of the Hired Guns, an interim consulting firm, and hostess of the pink-slip parties. "We were interviewing the other day, and a dude took his shoe off and scratched his toes," she says, disgusted.

A more dignified demeanor is back in style, and that goes for other aspects of your public face as well. Being whimsical is not going to score you points anymore -- so remove that personal rendition of the "Star-Spangled Banner" from your voice mail, and forget about standing outside the office wearing a sandwich board advertising yourself. In more sober times, sending balloon gifts to a prospective employer simply won't cut it. "Cutesy just isn't working," says Kaye. "It might get you noticed, but it may not be the kind of notice you want."

4. Be the aspirin.

In this tightfisted environment, any company that is willing to spend money to hire someone must need something pretty badly. The question for the job seeker: What is that itch, and how can I scratch it? "If the company has a headache," says Opton, "you want to be the aspirin. Look for ways to present solutions in every contact you have with the company, from the cover letter to the phone call to the interview itself. When asked how you'd handle a particular situation, ask for an opportunity to return at another time and make a presentation on your solution, says Hemming. "Prove that you can do the job. Do the assignment and then come back to the company. It's as if you're already working there."

5. Keep a cheat sheet.

Matthew Kelleher is a veteran of several dotcom efforts, including ittraffic, Barnesandnoble.com, and Watchworld.com. Now he's the marketing manager at Chelsea Interactive, an affiliate of Chelsea Property Group. He's had a lot of jobs in an unstable environment. So to be prepared for interviews, he keeps a master résumé on file, listing every worthy accomplishment of his entire professional career, from negotiating a deal with Apple to beating a sales

projection by 63%. He adds every accomplishment to the master list, so when it's time to find a new job, he can simply cut and paste the most relevant parts into a slimmed down résumé, and can develop very specific talking points for the interview. "Imagine a photographer or artist who has a portfolio," he says. "What you actually show is one thing, but keep track of all your stuff." Kelleher's master résumé has some 25 bullets for each job, and he can easily tailor a résumé without having to finesse what he did three years ago all over again.

6. Be prepared -- but don't overdo it.

In tough times, anyone who goes into an interview unprepared is dead in the water. Everyone knows that you have to research the company thoroughly before you land the interview and go in with guns blazing. You need to be armed with ready examples of what you learned in certain situations, how you demonstrated leadership, and the like. "In the new job market, you have to interview like an investor," says Nat Antman, an analyst at Reciprocal Inc., a digital distribution services company. "If you had a few million dollars, would you back the company you're interviewing? When I interviewed, I read everything that I could find on the company and spoke to people who were involved with it, including investors and employees. The work paid off two-fold. First, my interviewers were damned impressed that I was so diligent, and second, I landed a job with a company that is very well positioned."

But don't go too far, says Kaye. If you come out sounding too coached, you're in big trouble. "Sometimes, interviewees sound like they've written a script," she says. "People do the perfect case that shows a whole list of attributes but is over-rehearsed." If you feel yourself falling into that trap, says Kaye, it's okay to take a breather. "If I feel like I'm rattling, I might stop and say, 'Look, I may be overprepared. Let's step back for a second.' " Employers will appreciate your self-awareness, and they'll still be impressed by your preparation. But then you can remember to be yourself.

7. Celebrate your blunders.

It's not exactly intuitive and it won't come easily, but talking about your screwups may get you the job you want, says Colleen Aylward, president of recruiting firm Devon James Associates. "People are more interested in your mistakes," she says. "They want your asset value to help avoid screwups." Aylward tells the story of one woman who had trouble getting hired because she'd worked for a string of flops. "We grilled and grilled and grilled her on

what was wrong with those companies." The candidate ultimately rewrote the first paragraph of her résumé to say something like, "I took on the challenge of a company in total disarray, met challenges head on, and so on. I learned this from that, saw this downturn, made a mistake doing this." The woman got three job offers.

Humor helps too, says Lambo. During her job hunt, she regaled interviewers with the story of how her alumni magazine featured an article about her career success the very same month that she lost her job. "Everyone appreciates that kind of a story -- you get a little bit of recognition, and then you get smacked down. I used to work on Dilbert books, so I told people that it was kind of a Dilbert time in my life."

8. Follow up smart.

The interview seems to have gone well. Now it's time for you to stand out a little bit -- by following up better and smarter than the hordes scrambling for the same job. Start by contacting all the people you've spoken with at the company, whether they interviewed you or not. "Send thank-you notes to everyone," says Hemming, "and highlight things you referenced in the meeting." Also, don't forget the human-resources people, even if you got your interview through networking. "HR people can kill your hiring process. Turn them into your allies," says Hemming.

And while email is a socially acceptable way to follow up and the conventional response to an interview, you don't have to follow suit. You might send an email quickly, just to keep your name fresh in the employer's mind, and then send a real thank-you note. "Sending a regular letter captures attention. When's the last time you got a handwritten letter? If it's something addressed to you personally, you open it," says Hemming.

9. Coach your references.

You're about to get the offer. Now they want to check your references. If you don't have at least three at the ready, you're sunk, says Hemming. "You have to know where your references can be found. You need to follow up with them before the call and brief them on the hot points for that particular employer," she says.

McPherson makes it a practice to stay in touch with her references -- even going so far as to clip a story on how to find the best ginger cookies in New

York for a cookie-loving reference. She can't understand why people don't do that more often. If you don't brief your references, you may end up with an unfocused or vague recommendation that doesn't do much for your chances. It's best to have references from different companies, so they can speak to different skill sets at different organizations.

10. Keep the job.

You've got the job. Now make sure you keep it. If you don't make yourself a critical part of the organization within the first [60 days](#), you could be vulnerable if the economy turns again. "It's important that you adapt to the job and that the job adapts to your strengths," says Antman. "I've been working here for about five months, and frankly, I feel as if I've been interviewing every week." Soon after Antman arrived at Reciprocal, he was moved from sales to business development after the company laid off 29% of the staff. "I had a new boss and had to reinvent the job. I asked myself, 'Who am I, and what am I doing here? How can I contribute, and what can I take over?' The job market is too slippery these days to depend on your work to speak for itself."

Jennifer Reingold (jreingold@fastcompany.com) is a Fast Company senior writer.

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June 2001

How to Move Forward When You're Between Jobs



Learn how to transform a layoff into a savvy sabbatical -- a time to recharge your batteries and learn new skills without sabotaging your résumé. Author Hope Dlugozima offers tips for taking six months off smart.

by Anni Layne

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Spin doctors call it a "forced sabbatical." Your ex-boss used the term "development hiatus." And you tell your

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folks that it's a "severance retreat." Whatever the euphemism, the time between jobs need not become a lost era of *SportsCenter*, classified ads, and Danielle Steel novels. In fact, an unexpected layoff could be the best thing that ever happened to your career -- if you value a pink slip's hidden opportunities.

Ignore Monster.com's job board. Let the résumé languish. Use this downtime to build up rather than keep up, thrive rather than survive, and seek rather than hide, suggests career coach Hope Dlugozima. She encourages the recently downsized to defer cover letters and networking parties for a few weeks -- or a few months -- to unearth new types of opportunities. The smartest career move that you can make after a layoff, she says, is a move out of town -- on a sabbatical that will restore self-esteem, independence, and drive.

"Successful sabbaticals begin when people take advantage of the upheavals in life," says Dlugozima, author of *Six Months Off: How to Plan, Negotiate, and Take the Break You Need Without Burning Bridges or Going Broke* (Henry Holt, 1996). "Don't spend the next three months watching *Oprah*, drinking pineapple juice out of the can, and waiting for the phone to ring. Don't wait for fate to determine what happens next. Grab hold of your future. Make a proactive move, and you will recover the freedom and strength you lost after that layoff."

That all sounds good on paper. But aren't sabbaticals only for rabbis and tenured professors?

Hardly, says Dlugozima, who took an 18 -month sabbatical in Prague that helped her leapfrog careers and gain perspective on life. She says that a productive sabbatical should live up to the participant's specifications and goals, not outside expectations. A sabbatical can be cheap or expensive, exotic or domestic, extended or brief. But, according to Dlugozima, it absolutely must be personal and guilt - free.

The author of *What Color is Your Parachute* reckons with what has changed in the world of careers -- and what hasn't.

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"Think of yourself as a horse that's stopped by the side of the road to rest," Dlugozima says. "If you linger, another saddle will be put on your back, and you'll rejoin the wagon train. But if you take off running now, you'll be able to choose your own path because no one else is driving you." ▶ [Career Reinvention](#)

Here, Dlugozima offers five steps for blazing a brilliant trail during your forced sabbatical.

Start From Scratch

Whatever you've heard about sabbaticals is wrong. Sabbaticals are neither a luxury of the wealthy nor a plaything of the selfish. Above all, they need not compromise your financial security -- you don't have to lose your house while trying to find yourself.

Dlugozima recommends four strategies for financing a sabbatical: "Win it, beg it, save it, or do without it." Her book estimates that about 50,000 scholarships, fellowships, and grants exist in nooks and crannies around the globe. The exact number is difficult to verify, but the fact remains that potential sabbatical takers have a tremendous range of options from [Fulbright scholarships](#), to [professional-development fellowships](#), to [artistic and philanthropic grants](#).

Most of the abruptly downsized can't take advantage of corporate sabbatical programs or lifelong sabbatical savings, but everyone can think creatively. Dlugozima suggests timing a sabbatical with the end of your apartment lease or subletting your place for a few months. [Swap houses](#) with a home owner in Buenos Aires. Lend your car to a friend who will pay its insurance while you're gone. Choose a relatively cheap destination like Portugal or Costa Rica, rather than France or Switzerland. Or transform your sabbatical into a family-bonding experience by choosing a kid-friendly destination like [Ferry Beach](#) or [LEX America](#). (For more sabbatical recommendations, see the sidebar [Get Lost](#).)

"You can even take a sabbatical in your own backyard as long as you have a goal or accomplishment in mind," she says. "Money is the smallest challenge for people who really want to take a sabbatical. The largest hurdle is your mind-set -- the fear of diverging from the status quo, the fear of telling others, the fear of returning to normal life. Money is manageable; fear of the unknown is harder to deal with."

Dlugożima argues that now is an ideal time to get lost. As more smart people flood the talent pool this summer, job hunting will get harder before it gets easier. Why compete in the decade's tightest talent market if you can use the time to expand your career in creative ways? In the end, Dlugożima says, a smart applicant can leverage her sabbatical to score a better job.

"Suppose, seven months from now, I'm considering two résumés from two equally skilled people who got laid off around the same time," she says. "One applicant has been making phone calls, going on interviews, worrying, collecting unemployment checks, and trying to find a job. The other person has been pursuing some personal goals -- working for a nonprofit, taking a sabbatical in Thailand, expanding his vision of the world. In my mind, it's a no-brainer. I'm going to hire the person with a sense of adventure and risk, because chance takers attract like-minded people. And I want captivating people working for me."

Declare a Panic-Free Zone

You just packed your entire career into a brown cardboard box and joined the COBRA brigade. Now, don't freak. Panic seeps into cover letters, phone conversations, and email correspondence. Employers can smell it a mile away, and they will take advantage of a candidate's terror -- or recoil from it.

Dlugożima's advice? Don't bother thinking about résumés and paychecks for 30 days after your layoff. Declare a panic-free zone in which you can contemplate next steps, new goals, and old hang-ups without feeling pressure to attain any tangible, revenue-producing results. Use this time to ask yourself, "If I could do anything, what would I do?"

"The question becomes, 'How do you eat an elephant one bite at a time?' In other words, how do you whittle down the universe of possibilities into a manageable list that you can tackle in 30 days?" Dlugożima says. "I think Bill Murray said it best in *What About Bob?*: It's all about the baby steps."

Begin by jotting down realistic goals. Research four museums in Cairo. Find four environmental groups that work with children. Price five rental properties in Spain. Comb your brain for every whim, wish, and wasted opportunity that's ever flashed by. As you take inventory of those dreams, patterns will appear, and the perfect sabbatical will emerge, Dlugożima says.

Then seek out former colleagues and friends of friends who have taken sabbaticals, and listen intently as they gush. Connect with organizations that

offer fellowships, and ask to speak with past participants. Hook up with groups that solicit volunteers, and begin to infiltrate their ranks. Dlugozima recommends sparking conversations with big thinkers, not with former coworkers who will undoubtedly just want to compare job-hunting notes. When the 30 days are up, you should be ready either to launch your sabbatical or to sketch it out and save it for a better time in life.

"Think selfishly in your panic-free zone," Dlugozima says. "Oftentimes, an incredible job walks in the door when you least expect it. Resist the temptation to jump back into work right away. Give yourself this gift of 30 days, and really use it to think only about your time and your next steps."

Compose a Cover Story

Before you leave, think about your return.

Devise an elevator pitch that champions the merits of your sabbatical. If you plan to spend six months backpacking through Australia, concentrate your cover story on the two weeks that you will spend working with Habitat for Humanity in Perth. If you hope to bum around the Italian Riviera all summer, bring a diary and set the goal of starting your first novel.

"Don't worry about sticking word-for-word to your cover story," Dlugozima says. "Just devise a story that thrills you when you say it out loud. State the accomplishment first; make the steps to get you there second."

The best cover stories inspire envy, curiosity, and admiration while communicating some universally valued goal or ambition. They intrigue others while inspiring you. Half of that challenge lies in choosing the most provocative language.

"Nomenclature is everything in life," Dlugozima says. "Harness the power of the word 'sabbatical.' Don't call it a 'leave of absence,' because that sounds like a stay at the Betty Ford clinic. Don't say that you're going to figure out what you really want to do in life. That speaks of wealthy parents and no gumption. It implies that, until now, you haven't tackled anything really worthwhile. 'Sabbatical' holds a certain power and intrigue to it. It denotes a plan of action and a deliberate path."

Once you've fine-tuned your cover story, practice saying it out loud and putting it down on paper. Include your sabbatical at the top of your résumé. Dlugozima says that future employers will value and appreciate a sabbatical

description that suggests personal initiative, ambition, and practical experience -- regardless of the destination or specific goal.

"Plan to return from your sabbatical in a position of power," she says. "Having a solid cover story in place connotes an aura of success. If you emit a winning attitude, people will perceive you as a winner."

Share the Adventure

When the pink slip stops at their mailbox, most people seek sympathy and validation from family and friends, so they compose a "good-bye" email under the guise of passing along new contact information. Dlugozima encourages you to resist the temptation. She says that those email messages, which often solicit job leads and suggest financial woes, only succeed in making your loved ones feel guilty about not being able to help.

Instead, wait a month or two, and write an upbeat, newsy email containing exciting information about your planned sabbatical. Make your trip sound meaningful and appealing, but don't rub it in that you'll be learning to hula in Maui while your friends endure yet another PowerPoint presentation at work.

"Keep the email straightforward and businesslike," Dlugozima says. "Above all, trust no one. Even if you're scared to death of embarking on a six-month sabbatical, don't confess those fears to anyone except your closest friend. Keep your outside appearance confident."

Once you've embarked on your sabbatical, keep friends and colleagues engaged in your adventure through periodic correspondence that stresses your personal growth and social contributions. "You want people to live vicariously through you -- and you want potential employers to know that you're out there acquiring the skills they need and becoming a more fascinating person at the same time," Dlugozima writes in *Six Months Off*. "Cultivate a larger-than-life image."

Keep Hope Alive

The most stressful aspect of taking a sabbatical may be the return to civilization. Dlugozima says that postsabbatical depression plagues the majority of people who return from fantastic voyages to the same old, same old. Her antidote? Begin by planning your next sabbatical immediately.

But assuming that mortgage payments and career aspirations will prevent most people from launching one sabbatical after another, Dlugozima offers more practical advice for combating the real-world blues. First, schedule at least one week of transition time between your return home and your return to career obligations. Use that time to reorganize your life and to acclimate yourself to postsabbatical living. "Treat yourself tenderly," Dlugozima advises.

Next, commemorate the end of your sabbatical with a ceremony of your own design. Host a welcome-back party at your house to share stories and photos. Set aside one evening to reread your travel diary. Treat yourself to that bottle of Merlot you picked up in France. Somehow, achieve a feeling of closure, so you can effectively advance to the next chapter.

Finally, institute personal rituals designed to keep you in touch with the people, places, and adventures that you encountered during your sabbatical. If you worked at a newspaper in Moscow, make contact with the Russian-American organization in your region. If you volunteered with an environmental group in Peru, offer to write an article about your experience for the Greenpeace Web site. The greatest benefits of your sabbatical may emerge from something you do while seeking closure.

"Courage was my greatest sabbatical take-away," Dlugozima says. "Talk of layoffs just doesn't bother me anymore. I became more resourceful during my sabbatical, and as a result, I lost my fear of the unknown. By thinking back to my days in Prague and the risks I took there, I evoke a feeling of fearlessness and confidence that permeates my work and life. My sabbatical will never truly end."

Hope Dlugozima currently works as the creative director for [WebMD](#) and as a career-shift coach for [iVillage.com](#), where she contributes expert advice to the [career-shifting message board](#).

Anni Layne (alayne@fastcompany.com) is the Fast Company senior Web editor.

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June 2001

Get Lost

Don't just sit there -- consider these 10 sabbaticals selected by the Fast Company staff, then steal them, tweak them, and pass them on.

by **Anni Layne** and **Christine Engelken**

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Eight years ago, Hope Dlugozima hit a wall. At age 33, the media professional was pinned between a comfortable job and an unrelenting itch for ... well, something more ... more challenging, more adventurous, more fulfilling.

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"When I graduated from college, I started working right away. And, like many people, I was good at what I first chose to pursue," she says. "I woke up 13 years later and asked myself, 'Wait, does this mean the doors to alternative opportunities are closed forever?' I couldn't accept that. I didn't want to put aside my dreams and personal goals to stay on a path that I fell on to at a very early age."

So Dlugozima negotiated a sabbatical that allowed her to work as an "unpaid apprentice" for the Fox Network and Time-Warner, where she learned broadcast skills that bolstered her résumé. Then she worked with the [Center for Interim Programs](#) to plan an 18-month sabbatical in Prague, where she satisfied her thirst for adventure and personal growth by becoming a features editor for the *Prague Post*, an English-language newspaper in the Czech Republic.

Dlugozima returned to the United States with the tools she needed to launch a new career and to coauthor a book titled *Six Months Off: How to Plan, Negotiate, and Take the Break You Need Without Burning Bridges or Going Broke* (Henry Holt, 1996). Today, she is the creative director for WebMD and a career-shift coach for iVillage.com, as well as a mother and fervent sabbatical proponent.

In the spirit of reinvention and reawakenings of the sort Dlugozima experienced, Fast Company has assembled the following list of provocative and diverse sabbaticals -- 10 ways to spend the downturn building up your personal portfolio. Tune in, turn on, drop out.

[Lost Cities Expeditions: Choquequirao](#)

Why it's cool: Explore the famed Incan city of Machu Picchu, and journey through mountain passes and over raging rivers on a 17-day tour of Peru. Your destination: the mysterious settlement of Choquequirao, a major archaeological site that still hides historical and

careers -- and what hasn't.

[Find Your Calling](#)
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[Do You Realize Your Potential?](#)
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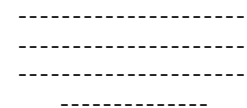
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sociological secrets from the world.

How to spin it: Trekking ancient roads and perusing centuries-old dwellings offer important lessons in enduring value -- the Incas clearly recognized the worth of institutions that are built to last!

[The Bellagio Center](#)

Why it's cool: The Rockefeller Foundation hosts monthlong retreats for voracious students of all varieties at the Bellagio Study and Conference Center, located on Lake Como in northern Italy. Collaborate with colleagues from around the world, attend provocative workshops, or contribute to a team project revolving around such topics as global inclusion or creativity and culture. Use the center's creative-energy vibes to incubate the novel, thesis, or Broadway musical that you've been meaning to develop.

How to spin it: Interacting with people from widely varied disciplines, backgrounds, and locales at the Bellagio Center provides lessons in the power of collaboration and diversity, essential skills in the emerging global economy. The center's resident program requires participants to produce some sort of creative work during their stay, so you'll leave with concrete results to show prospective employers -- and valuable experience completing a major project on a tight time frame.

[Latin American Art Resource Project](#)

Why it's cool: Learn to sculpt and paint with indigenous Honduran materials, or help artists in poor Central American communities build a business using the resources at hand. In three months, you'll learn Spanish, lead workshops, and create original works of art -- creative therapy at its best.

How to spin it: By developing your creative side and hatching strategies for stretching available resources and minimal funds, you'll acquire skills that will make penny-pinching tech firms drool.

[Fiji's World Class Diving and Underwater Photography](#)

Why it's cool: Dive among reefs located off the Fiji Islands, and photograph

tropical fish as they swim past your scuba mask. Spend 15 days frolicking with whales and dolphins, or just relax on the deck of the sailing yacht *Nai'a* as you soak up the South Pacific sunlight and indulge in introspection.

How to spin it: Practicing photography will hone your appreciation of design, and scuba diving will confirm your risk-taker status. Plus, you can study teamwork by watching the seamless cooperation of the marine-mammal pods as they swim alongside your ship.

[Global Citizens Network: Arizona](#)

Why it's cool: Live as part of the Hopi community in Arizona's Painted Desert while working to construct a youth center for the reservation's underserved children. During a one-week stay, the villagers of Shungopavi will introduce you to such traditional trades as basket weaving, desert farming, and jewelry design.

How to spin it: Layoff victims can take inspiration from the Hopi people's resilience in the face of adversity. Participating in the tribe's spirit of cooperation and innovation will enhance your team-building skills and your ability to rebound from setbacks.

[The Ultimate Kailas](#)

Why it's cool: Embark on a 34-day spiritual journey through Tibetan mountain ranges, witness a Hindu full-moon festival, and take time for meditation and self-reflection at high-altitude sacred sites.

How to spin it: Sometimes perspective is the best antidote to overanalysis and overreaction. An employee who can separate the truly significant from the truly mundane will help any company as it faces the turbulent times ahead.

[Outward Bound Epic Surf Adventure](#)

Why it's cool: Let the waves rolling off Costa Rica's shoreline wash away your woes. On this monthlong excursion, expert guides help novices and veterans alike stay on top of some of the world's best ocean swells.

How to spin it: New surfers demonstrate the ability and willingness to learn

on the job and to persist despite wipeouts. Experts show their readiness to meet new challenges and build upon their existing skill set -- even while swimming among sharks!

[International Volunteer Work Programs: Ghana](#)

Why it's cool: Ghana's rain forests and savannas provide exhilarating forums for imparting and collecting business wisdom. For up to six months, help local entrepreneurs achieve financial success by leading seminars on such basics as record keeping and product marketing.

How to spin it: If your dotcom lost track of reality during the Internet boom, a refresher course on the rules of business will help get your feet back on the ground -- and in the door at a globally minded company that can use your hands-on experience at teaching strategies for success.

[French Language & Cooking Institute](#)

Why it's cool: Stay in an 18th-century château in the French countryside while learning the native tongue and preparing culinary delights. Language classes last for up to four weeks, and French cuisine courses require just one additional week. Family and significant others are welcome to join in the cultural immersion.

How to spin it: Your classroom is the world. Rather than sitting behind a desk with a pencil and paper, you prefer to jump right in and experiment. Take this daring attitude with you to job interviews -- along with homemade crepes or quiche -- and you're sure to feed any employer's hunger for innovation.

[Saving China's Monkeys](#)

Why it's cool: In the tropical climate of southern China, novice volunteer teams will help Dr. Zhaoyuan Li save two of the rarest monkey species in the world. Track the monkeys' behavior, analyze their habitat, and draft a management plan to ensure their survival on this two-week environmental expedition.

How to spin it: This animal-conservation mission will teach you how to focus

on the details as you monitor behavior, examine environments, and forecast changing conditions. In short, it will sharpen your ability to observe and understand unfamiliar communities -- and to recognize monkey business in the workplace.

Anni Layne (alayne@fastcompany.com) is the Fast Company senior Web editor. Christine Engelken, a former Fast Company intern, is a student at Northwestern University.

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June 2001

What Counts in a Job Now

Forget promises of options, Foosball tables, and free breakfast buffets. Today's job seekers want more tangible rewards, like challenging work, skilled managers -- and cash.

by Jennifer Reingold

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Hard to believe, but it's been only a year since people rejected jobs for reasons like "They won't let me bring my Chihuahua to the office" or "They said my piercings would have to go, so I left." But just because there are a lot fewer jobs around these days, doesn't mean that people are willing to accept any job. Sure, standards have changed, but they haven't gone away. What people want in a real job these days is not about

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We asked veterans of new-economy jobs what they are looking for in a job now, and they had plenty to say. They've learned what counts and what's window dressing. They know what defines a great job and a fulfilling career, what separates a real manager from a poseur, and what differentiates a real business plan from a movie treatment.

Here are eight things that matter most now.

Challenging Work

Ping-Pong tables and wet bars are an embarrassing memory. What people seek, above all now, is a challenge. Many employees feel that the frenzy of their prior startups kept them locked into repetitive chores simply because they were good at those things. Now people are craving inspiration. They want to work on a project or service that makes them feel they can make a difference in people's lives or can transform a business. "We're cycling back to more fundamental values that were temporarily distorted by opportunism and greed," says André Delbecq, director of the Institute for Spirituality of Organizational Leadership and professor of management at Santa Clara University. "A job has to be purposeful."

A Future

No one expects to stay for years and years at a company. But people do not want to keep getting laid off every three months either. It's bad for the budget, not to mention the morale. Burned by past empty promises, employees are obsessed with the idea of working at a place that makes an honest-to-goodness product or service. They want a clearly visible path to profitability, with supportive investors and partners already in place, and a CEO who can articulate the strategy and doesn't shrink from tough questions. If they don't find that,

changed in the world of careers -- and what hasn't.

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they'll look elsewhere -- or change their minds quickly. "We have taught people to leave," says Colleen Aylward, president of the recruiting firm Devon James Associates. Note to managers: Do not, under any circumstances, mention an upcoming IPO to a prospective hire. You'll be laughed out of the room.

Honesty

Although many people in the workforce are fairly young, they are no longer naive. They know when they're being fed a bunch of baloney, and to them, there is nothing more repugnant. So if the company's experiencing trouble, they want to know about it, directly from the head of the company or the business unit. They can handle it. If they are not meeting expectations, they need to be told, so they can improve. And when offering a job to candidates, don't promise them the world -- simply tell them what you need from them, and be honest about the tough parts. If you think the job may change, tell them. Candidates are flexible these days -- as long as they don't feel that they got a snow job on the way in.

A Chance to Become More Marketable

People know that their job won't last forever. They know that things might not work out and that they could get the boot one day. So what do they want? The chance to gain skills that will round out their abilities -- and that will make them more employable in their next job. That doesn't mean they'll be less loyal -- on the contrary, employees tend to stay longer at places that don't try to fence them in. One company, NetPace Inc., an e-commerce solutions provider, now has regular technology rotations, so staff technologists become familiar with all the latest innovations. "One thing we've been doing is ensuring that our people are not bored by run-of-the-mill projects," says Omar Khan, co-CEO of NetPace.

A Manager With a Clue

Managers don't have to have gray hair and wrinkles -- nor should they revert to the old command-and-control mentality -- but they do have to have experience, as well as respect for the act of managing itself. And employees want regular, periodic reviews, something that didn't happen much in the frenzy of the past few years. Job seekers want to know about your culture and how people are retained, says Beverly Kaye, president of Career Systems

International, a talent retention and development company and coauthor of *Love 'Em or Lose 'Em: Getting Good People to Stay* (Berrett-Koehler, 1999), "You'd better be able to answer those questions, and you'd better not fib."

Accountability

People who are still interested in the startup world now want to work in a place where what they contribute can be measured, both by the boss and in a way that can be demonstrated in their next job. Judy Chang, a veteran of three startups, says it's key to work in a place that gives performance reviews and takes them seriously. "I was promised reviews that never materialized or that were delayed months and months," she says. "When the review finally came, it was one-sided -- 'Here's what I think.' If I had known what the boss was thinking, I would have changed."

A Respect for Balance

Now that everything has slowed down, job seekers are thinking more than ever about work-life balance. It's not that working hard is a problem; it's that working hard simply to work hard is a huge problem. That mentality is a big change from last year, when people were still willing to freeze their lives in the hopes that they'd hit the jackpot. Today, they no longer believe that they're going to make a million bucks in an IPO, so they won't put their lives on hold waiting for the big kill. They will work extremely hard to support a new product launch or to finish a critical project, but they now find the idea of working late hours because it's supposed to be "cool" rather absurd. Better, they say, to follow the lead of Mia Di Giovanni, CEO of SmoothSale Inc., a software company that helps online sales reps, and a veteran of several other successful high-powered startups, such as GeoCities and Xoom. In her nonwork life, she's a semiprofessional polo player and has been for many years -- and she sees absolutely no conflict between the two. "It's a huge warning signal to me if people don't have a life outside their job. I play polo on Friday afternoons and Sundays, and I'm not going to miss that. I've worked my schedule around that commitment for the past 10 years, and I've never let myself get into a position where it wasn't acceptable."

Cash

Stock options have had their day, and the once-ubiquitous pay cut for equity is no more. These days, options are seen as a perk that will probably never

pan out -- something nice to have but unlikely to form a retirement nest egg. Job seekers realize that leverage may have shifted back to employers -- and they know the salaries offered last year may be tough to beat. But employers hoping to attract good candidates will need to offer hard currency instead of paper dreams to get the talent they want.

Jennifer Reingold (jreingold@fastcompany.com) is a Fast Company senior writer.

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June 2001

Memo to Self: Take a Hike!

How one vice president at Altrec.com helped save the company by downsizing his own job. A layoff saga with a hopeful twist.

by Anni Layne

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Perhaps the only thing worse than getting the ax is wielding the ax ... over your own head. Call it professional suicide, career masochism, or a gentleman's code of honor. Seven months ago, Chris Doyle called it a foregone conclusion. So during a make-it-or-break-it era for the company he helped develop, the vice president of public relations signed his own walking papers -- voluntarily and without spite.

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Last fall, Altrec.com was fighting against strong odds and discouraging analyst predictions for its place in the crowded and highly competitive outdoor-gear and adventure market. Altrec's venture capitalists had balked, the economy had collapsed, and the competition looked more daunting than ever. Doyle questioned whether Altrec could keep its head above water after the crucial holiday-shopping season without scoring new funding or cutting its staff.

In a last-ditch effort to salvage a good thing, Doyle surrendered his job so that Altrec could fight on. He insisted on his own departure primarily because he feared that his colleagues wouldn't. Altrec's close-knit corporate culture valued personal relationships above almost all else. But Doyle didn't want Altrec to protect its employees from layoffs only to sabotage the company in the process, so he downsized his own job. And he wasn't the only one.

Thanks in part to two rounds of layoffs in late 2000, Altrec is the only pure-play outdoor-gear retailer left standing in a market now dominated by brick-and-mortar stalwarts REI, Eastern Mountain Sports, and L.L. Bean. The story of Chris Doyle and Altrec.com is one of loyalty, truth, and self-preservation. And, by God, it ain't over yet.

Before the Fall

"I'd never taken a professional risk that large before," Doyle says of his decision to join the Bellevue, Washington startup in 1998. "When Altrec first approached me, I asked, 'What are you doing to ensure your success when the market crashes?' I was a nervous Nellie while everyone else was euphoric."

Still, Altrec's potential and leadership lured Doyle to the company months before its site debuted online. He was immediately swept up in the exhilaration of launching a dotcom in an economy drunk on its own success. As vice president of PR, Doyle began transforming Altrec.com from a quirky little hiking site into a household name. He was a man on a mission,

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and he would stop at nothing less than market domination.

"At the time, 5 to 20 players were jumping into every market niche," says Shannon Stowell, vice president of business development for Altrec. "We believed that Altrec needed to build a big brand to become a category killer. We engaged in some massive overbuilding, all in an effort to become the next Amazon."

Then came April 14, 2000, and the earth shifted beneath Altrec's Gore-Tex trail runners. Just weeks before finalizing a deal to buy GreatOutdoors.com and land an investment from Cox Interactive Media -- all to the tune of \$10.5 million -- Altrec had to start defending its every move. The same investors who had insisted on massive, persistent branding just weeks before began questioning every dotcom's burn rate. CEO Mike Morford hunkered down to concentrate on raising capital and merging Altrec with GreatOutdoors.com. Meanwhile, competing site MVP.com was launching a \$50 million marketing plan starring John Elway, Michael Jordan, and Wayne Gretzky.

The Long Haul

In the calm before the crash, Morford huddled with his senior management team to assess the damage. The diagnosis was bleak, but not hopeless. Early in 2000, Altrec signed a major deal with a network of travel agencies, called Virtuoso, and partnered with *National Geographic* to create an interactive tour of the nation's hiking trails, called [On the American Trail](#). Traffic was climbing, and more people than ever were buying merchandise on the site. It looked as if Bellevue's spunkiest little startup just might make it through the Web war unscathed.

Then again, maybe not.

"In August, a new reign of nervousness settled in," Doyle says. "There was the promise and hope of new venture capital, but we never saw any term sheets."

Morford says that an overly cautious funding environment prevented Altrec from capitalizing on its relationship with Cox and from landing any additional partnerships or investments during the summer of 2000. And then MVP.com announced a deal to buy PlanetOutdoors.com, and it appeared that Altrec had been shut out of the marketplace.

"At the time, MVP was very well funded with some stellar venture capitalists

and big-name celebrities," Morford says. "We never even considered the possibility that MVP would *not* get future funding. We knew then that we were up against a big, big challenge, and our primary goal was survival."

That is when Doyle and Erick Soderstrom, vice president of marketing, told the rest of the management group that, given the drought of money, partners, and potential buyers, Altrec must plan for layoffs. And they volunteered to be the first to go.

Morford refused the offer. He insisted that a company built on solidarity, trust, and communication could fight its way out of any hole. The dogmatic CEO ordered his 40-odd employees to charge ahead at full speed. "The customers loved us, and more sales were coming in every day," Morford says. "There was a disconnect between our own skyrocketing numbers and the media reports about the death of the Internet. I hoped that, with a little more time, we could communicate our internal success to the outside world and bring in more funding. I didn't want to reduce the staff size at all.

"Unlike many other dotcoms, we didn't just hire résumés or use an expensive recruiter. We went through an intense level of scrutiny when putting together our team. And I knew that it would be incredibly hard to replicate or reproduce such a combination of talent ever again. I wanted to make absolutely sure that we explored all other options before going down the layoff path."

Despite the risk of losing valuable team members, Morford made the severity of the situation clear to the Altrec staff. He opened the books, calculated the stark reality, and laid down a deadline: late September. If money wasn't rolling in by then, about half the staff members could expect a pink slip.

"We were willing to take that risk because we wanted to respect people's personal lives and what they were dealing with outside the company," Morford says. "This way, everyone in the company knew the issues facing Altrec and began working together to tackle them, rather than competing and engaging in political infighting during our toughest hour."

The September deadline came and went. Doyle inquired about the layoffs. He received no answer. The notion of a perfect company culture went out the window as stress and despair replaced trust and communication. Doyle says that a "nominal paralysis" overcame employees as they lamented, braced themselves, and waited.

"Sales were climbing, and new deals were being struck, but I knew we weren't

clear of trouble. That made me nervous, because I didn't want anything candy-coated for me or my team," he says. "I became conflicted as I prepared mentally to leave Altrec, but worked tirelessly to keep the business alive. I felt as if I were pushing back the ocean."

The Last Stop

Doyle calls it the "Come-to-Jesus meeting" -- the final supper for Altrec's leaders when he and Soderstrom once again offered to sacrifice their own jobs for the good of the company. This time, they weren't refused.

"Basically, anyone who wasn't serving the customer directly or facilitating the supply-and-demand chain was gone," Doyle says. During its first round of layoffs, Altrec cut about 16 jobs in its content, business-development, marketing, and public-relations departments -- nearly half its staff. Certainly, it would be difficult to trudge on without press releases, media coverage, and fresh content like [Crown of Africa](#), the stunning multimedia presentation that earned Altrec industry acclaim, but decisions had to be made. In the end, Altrec let a number of senior managers go, including Soderstrom, senior content producer Cathryn Buchanan, and director of human resources Jim Helmich.

"It was one of the most difficult things that I've ever done," Morford says. "I had to let some personal friends go for reasons totally unrelated to their performance. I was incredibly humbled by people's responses to the situation. Those responses proved to me that Altrec's culture was just as strong as we guessed it to be."

Remarkably, eight downsized or spared employees, ranging from vice presidents to junior staffers, offered to work for free or for a reduced salary. Morford kindly declined their offers. Instead, he gave each downsized staffer at least two weeks' notice. They were welcome to leave immediately or stay for a few weeks to help with the company's transition. In addition, they were welcome to use Altrec's phones, faxes, and computers to help them find new jobs. Most of the people laid off in October and November stayed on the job until the end, and some even returned for a few days of unpaid consulting.

"You can't pull off that camaraderie at the last minute," Stowell says. "A level of trust was built very early on that helped us make it through the horrible experience and emerge on the other side as friends."

Altrec headed into the holiday season with a skeleton crew, and Doyle was among the former employees who stuck around as a consultant and adviser.

"Our papers were already signed, but we were helping the company," Doyle says. As media inquiries regarding the layoffs streamed in, Doyle's continuing assistance proved vital to maintaining Altrec's public image as it weathered its internal storm.

Happily Ever After?

Are the folks in Washington drinking water contaminated with a Pollyanna virus? Are they always so gosh-darn nice? Doyle doesn't think his behavior was all that nice -- just smart. "I don't burn bridges with anyone ever," he says. Good move. Following a short sabbatical with his wife and young son, Doyle began work at a major multinational public-relations firm in January 2001. Four months later, he was downsized once again.

"On April 23, two individuals entered my office at 10 AM, talked to me for 60 seconds, and removed my computer access instantly. I was dumbfounded," Doyle says of the sudden layoff. "So, on April 24, I secured my business license and started Doyle Public Relations."

One of the first clients to sign on was Altrec.com, which is, ironically enough, hiring. The majority of Doyle's clients are young entrepreneurs looking for startup savvy in addition to PR expertise. Twice bitten, Doyle is only too eager to jump back into the fight. Only this time, he's brandishing a few new tricks.

"I have a much stronger business strategist's mind now," he says. "I understand tactics, tough decisions, and the importance of dealing straight with people. Of the five RFPs I submitted after forming Doyle Public Relations, three were accepted. I think that's because I've learned to focus on the fundamentals -- the sound business solutions. If you cut to the chase, you will succeed."

Meanwhile, Altrec is emerging from beneath the rubble to find that the sun can still shine for dotcoms in 2001. Since November 2000, at least three of Altrec's major competitors -- Gear.com, MVP.com, and Fogdog.com -- have slashed jobs, sold out, and all but disappeared from the landscape. Major competition remains, but Altrec continues to pursue and bag meaningful deals and investments. Earlier this month, Altrec announced a partnership with [Outward Bound](#) that will make it the exclusive online retailer for the American wilderness school.

"The two people who brought that relationship home were involved in last year's layoffs," Stowell says. "They called Outward Bound before their

departures to reassure the school that it should do the deal with Altrec regardless. That integrity really blew me away."

Altrec closed a round of funding totaling \$1.5 million late last month, and Morford says that the company is on track to hit profitability by the end of 2001. He says that the company's sales have risen 260% since last year and that its traffic has more than doubled. And perhaps more tellingly, current employees and alums of Altrec who spent Memorial Day weekend hiking and mountain biking together are planning a river-rafting event for late June. Maybe they just really are *that* nice.

All of this camaraderie doesn't mean Altrec's wild ride hasn't caused some pain. But former employees like Doyle seem to believe that whatever doesn't kill you makes you stronger -- or, at least, more masochistic.

"However painful, frustrating, and unnerving, I wouldn't trade my experience with Altrec.com for anything," Doyle says. "Pain is a good learning tool. In essence, I got my MBA from the university of life during a social uprising."

Anni Layne (alayne@fastcompany.com) is the Fast Company senior Web editor. Learn more about [Altrec](#) and [Doyle Public Relations](#). Contact Shannon Stowell (shannons@altrec.com) and Chris Doyle (cdbolt@rcsis.com) via email.

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Legions of recently downsized workers are gathering to gripe, network, and find jobs on the Web. To join this virtual support group, all you need is a pink slip, a résumé, and a bitter streak.

by Cecilia Rothenberger and Christine Engelken

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following list of Web sites was handpicked by Fast Company to aid the recently unemployed in their search for work, contacts, and a shoulder to cry on.

[PlanetPinkSlip.com](#)

This site promises a haven "for the laid-off, fired, downsized, rightsized or otherwise unemployed" with generous helpings of humor. Get advice on layoff etiquette and pink-slip party pickup lines. While you're browsing, be sure to cruise by the store, where you can find coffee mugs and T-shirts donning slogans like "Paycheck, schmaycheck" and "I wasn't fired. I was given a career change opportunity." Also, be sure to sign up for the site's newsletter, "The Unemployment Line," which offers hints for surviving a layoff, job-opening announcements, and some tasty Ramen Noodle recipes.

[The Layoff Lounge](#)

This group of professionals holds monthly recruiting and networking events that serve the technology, telecom, and media industries across the United States. Use this site to broadcast your stellar résumé and to stay in touch with various contacts through regional networks and discussions.

[Layoff Survival Kit](#)

This CareerBuilder microsite offers a boost to laid-off executives climbing back on the career horse. The recently downsized can read articles -- such as "Forty and Fired" and "Rebounding From a Layoff" -- launch a full-scale job search, join a discussion (aka "bitch session"), and tap into countless other career resources.

[Dot-Com Layoffs and Shutdowns](#)

This comprehensive list of job cuts and bankruptcy filings at Web-related companies contains links to relevant news stories from the *Wall Street Journal*.

[CareerJournal.com](#)

This product of the *Wall Street Journal* offers high-caliber information about salaries, interviews, and executive recruiting alongside career counseling, a job-search engine powered by Futurestep, and provocative articles that touch upon free agency, stock options, career events, and more.

[WetFeet.com](#)

This research and advice site offers employees, job seekers, and employers collections of articles that gauge the current job market and in-depth information that covers companies and organizations in a wide range of industries.

[Monster.com](#)

Monster.com is a reputed career hub, but its offerings far surpass the standard résumé postings and job searches. Now free agents and executives receive the same services once offered to only midlevel professionals and rookies. The expanded [Career Center](#) features articles, advice, and special in-depth reports about current employment issues.

[Yahoo! News: Downsizing and Layoffs](#)

This index of news stories and related Web sites provides a running count of company closings, staff reductions, and missed earnings reported by various media around the globe.

[HR Plaza: Fast Facts](#)

This area of the HR Plaza site reads like *SportsCenter* -- just the stats, please. Find out about mass layoffs, distribution of pink slips by region and industry, and many more depressing facts.

[MeansBusiness](#)

This site boasts a database of 20,000 big ideas and smart concepts culled from business and management books. The [Layoffs, Downsizing & Survivor Syndrome](#) section features extracts from books like *Downsizing Sensibly*, *Forgotten Survivors*, and *Implementing the Decision to Terminate*, among others.

Cecilia Rothenberger (crothenberger@fastcompany.com) is the Fast Company Web staff writer. Christine Engelken, a former Fast Company intern, is a student at Northwestern University.

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introspective diagnostics don't always make sense when you're hurtling headfirst toward unintended free agency.

On the other hand, online quizzes provide the instant feedback you need when your access to a T-1 line is facing extinction.

"The ultimate human questions are: Who am I? What's my place in the world?" says James Currier, founder and CEO of quiz-mania site Emode.com. "Online quizzes offer a pure dose of the answers to those questions." Or at least a cheap laugh -- a welcome antidote to the day's dispiriting economic headlines.

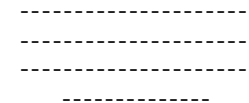
Let's look, for example, at that inner-calling question. Even if you can't find time to conduct a full-blown parachute analysis before seeking a new career path, chances are you will be able to spare five minutes to find the career equivalent of spiritual guidance through the [Success Likelihood Test](#) or to scout a new job title with [Which Executive Are You?](#) If the color of your parachute seems irrelevant, try asking [What Color is Your Aura?](#) instead. We only wish that test would sync up colors with job functions -- say, mauve for marketing types, azure for accountants.

If neither of these tickle the Vanna White in you, then take a look at the following online quizzes, all designed to reveal a character trait. They were handpicked by fastcompany.com as sources of on-the-fly guidance and unabashed fun.

[Emode](#)

The Emode home page oozes with feel-good graphics, including its signature sunflower, flitting fairies, and a bouncing Lhasa apso. The happy-happy, joy-joy escalates on the site's pick list of quizzes, which includes the infamous [What's Your Superpower?](#) Perhaps you're secretly psychic -- able to foresee corporate downsizing in time to update your résumé. Or maybe you're a time traveler -- able to dash back to 1986 and snap up shares of Microsoft.

Emode's flagship quiz, [The Ultimate Personality Test](#), sorts takers into lighthearted categories, such as Secret Agent and Movie Star, based on responses to probing statements like "I'll pick my nose in public if I think no one's looking." Meanwhile, [Are You Sure You're You?](#) allows dotcom refugees the opportunity to consider a profitable character shift. Are you sure you weren't meant to be a corporate drone? Think about it.



Emode's frivolity spreads like an infectious -- albeit amusing -- disease through the site's scorecard, which allows addicts to blast friends and coworkers with links to the site's top quizzes and then compare results. Only goes to show that the one thing better than distracting yourself from the day's tedium is taking your loved ones down with you.

[QueenDom.com](#)

This "home of serious entertainment" encourages lethal levels of slacking with quizzes like [Are You a Procrastinator?](#) "Self-talk yourself into believing that you will be happier in the end if you act on things," advises QueenDom, oblivious to its own status as a work-avoidance tool.

The [Burnout Test](#) gauges whether workaholics are reaching the top of their game or the end of their rope. When stress balls and personal days can't provide any more relief, turn to QueenDom for meltdown prevention.

[QuizBox](#)

Think instant gratification. QuizBox's 100 quizzes, mostly composed of just one question each, play out like a fast and furious tarot reading.

Use these one-click wonders to discover the hidden implications of personal preferences like [your favorite ice-cream flavor](#). QuizBox decrees that a craving for coffee-flavored ice cream demonstrates confidence; a predilection for strawberry indicates an affectionate nature.

Even the most ardent workaholic can squeeze in a few of these pint-sized quizzes -- and even the most vigilant boss probably won't catch on.

[TheSpark.com](#)

Trembling in your wing tips as recession casualties pile up left and right? Vent some frustration with TheSpark's irreverent amusements.

The [Death Test](#) welcomes quiz takers with festive skulls and crossbones. This life-expectancy gauge determines the exact date of your death and invites you to make a note of it on your Palm. More cheerful results await visitors to the [Wealth Test](#), which calculates how and when former paper millionaires will

really hit the jackpot.

[outofservice.com](#)

Think your boss possesses all the charm of Darth Vader? Perhaps he's a dark lord in executive's clothing! This minimalist site features the ever-popular [Find Your Star Wars Twin](#) -- a surprisingly thorough personality analysis based on the traits of Luke Skywalker, Han Solo, and, of course, Chewbacca.

Meanwhile, [Are you a blurter or a brooder?](#) analyzes both the water cooler blabbermouth and the office hermit. Do you feel the fear and do it anyway, or duck and cover under your desk? Outofservice.com says that networkers make better leaders than loners. But if your CEO spends his days locked away in a corner office, sobbing into his Starbucks cappuccino, you don't need this quiz to tell you that it's time to find a new gig.

Christine Engelken, a former Fast Company intern, is a student at Northwestern University.

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Need a boost? Sit down with one of these 20 books recommended by Fast Company's cadre of career experts. Get smart. Get inspired. Get work.



by Anni Layne

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Search Amazon.com for "career help," and your results will include a list of 168 titles ranging from *Zen and the Art of Making a Living* to *Bounceback Self-Marketing* and much more. Help for the frustrated, frazzled, and fired has never been more readily available ... or more overwhelming.

That's why Fast Company has compiled the following

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Counselor and author Richard Leider explains his laws for finding purpose in your work and life.

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This expert headhunter

[Devon James Associates Inc.](#)

"best of" index -- recommended titles from four of the nation's most highly regarded career counselors, headhunters, recruiters, and free-agent advocates.

offers a unique method for finding your calling.

[Interview With a Headhunter](#)

In the eat-or-be-eaten world of job hunting, if you misfire, you're dead.

[How to Play the Talent Game](#)

Colleen Aylward says that if you want to win the best people, you've got to understand the new rules of dotcom hiring.

[What Counts in a Job Now](#)

Today's job seekers want tangible rewards, like challenging work, skilled managers -- and cash.

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Richard Leider
Founding partner
[The Inventure Group](#)

The best career books adopt an "inside out" approach to finding the right work. First, look inside yourself. Second, look out for tremendous new opportunities headed your way. Here are a few of my favorites.

[How to Find the Work You Love](#)

by Laurance G. Boldt
(Arkana, 1996)

This thin self-help manual provides an elegantly simple approach to defining what you want from life and work. Clear your mind to consider the author's provocative, introspective questions, and you will likely walk away with new insights and ideas to rebuild your career.

[Free to Succeed: Designing the Life You Want in the New Free Agent Economy](#)

by Barbara B. Reinhold
(Plume, 2001)

A convenient tool for job searchers at every stage of the game, this book provides a fast, easy look at how to join Free Agent Nation. Reinhold, career coach for Monster.com and director of Smith College's career center, helps readers identify their personality type and then suggests complementary types of independent work.

[We Are All Self-Employed: The New Social Contract for Working in a Changed World](#)

by Cliff Hakim
(Berrett-Koehler, 1994)

Redeployed? Downsized? Outright canned? This book argues that a job seeker must view himself as "self-employed" to regain control of his career -- and to steer it in a more desirable direction. Become your own boss today.

[Downshifting: How to Work Less and Enjoy Life More](#)

by John D. Drake

(Berrett-Koehler, 2001)

Hard times can bring soft landings -- as you jump from the top rung of the career ladder to achieve greater balance and satisfaction in your life. Author Drake says that down times are the best times to find meaning and purpose -- and then make the leap to a more fulfilling line of work. Geronimo!

[*What Color Is Your Parachute?: A Practical Manual for Job-Hunters and Career-Changers*](#)

by Richard Nelson Bolles

(Ten Speed Press, 2000)

This perennial classic still asks the right questions and provokes readers to take charge of their lives. Use the gritty exercises to hone your job-searching skills, and consider the inspirational text a source of career stimulation.

Richard Leider is a founding partner of the Inventure Group, a Minneapolis-based training firm that helps individuals, leaders, and teams discover the power of purpose. His own books include *Repacking Your Bags* (Berrett-Koehler, 1995, with David A. Shapiro), *The Power of Purpose* (Berrett-Koehler, 1997), and *Whistle While You Work* (Berrett-Koehler, 1995, with David A. Shapiro).

Nick Corcodilos

Headhunter, author, and Web host

[**Ask the Headhunter**](#)

The last thing job-hunters need is lots of career books. What they really need is perspective, so they can develop and communicate their value. That said, here is my list, with a personal favorite at the top!

[*Ask the Headhunter*](#)

by Nick Corcodilos

(Penguin/Plume, 1997)

The first thing any job-hunter needs is a solid debunking of America's employment system. It's an enormous racket that will waste your time as long as you let it. And you need to learn that to get hired, you need to demonstrate how you will produce profit for a company. That's a tall order, but it's imperative. This book gets you to profitability quickly.

[*How to Get Your Point Across in 30 Seconds or Less*](#)

by Milo O. Frank

(Washington Square Press, 1991)

This "incredible find" book was written by a Hollywood agent who knew what to say -- and how to say it -- to close a deal. People babble in interviews because they don't know how to make their point. This book can change that.

[Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion](#)

by Robert B. Cialdini
(Quill, 1993)

My mentor gave me this book years ago, and I've passed it along to many friends and clients. You can't get hired or succeed at work unless you understand the parameters of influence in our society. This is the cookbook for human relations.

[The Enlightened Mind: An Anthology of Sacred Prose](#)

edited by Stephen Mitchell
(HarperPerennial, 1993)

You might know business and work, but if you don't pause now and then to know yourself and life, you will never develop the ideas and perspective that lead to big success. When I'm at a loss for ideas, I turn to this history of spiritual readings -- from the Upanishads (8000 BC) through Shunryu Suzuki -- to find new ones.

[A Whack on the Side of the Head: How You Can Be More Creative](#)

by Roger Von Oech
(Warner Books, 1998)

This revised classic still sets heads spinning. Out of the spinning comes great ideas that will make companies want to hire you.

A veteran headhunter with more than 20 years experience, Nick Corcodilos is president and host of Ask the Headhunter and president of the North Bridge Group Inc.

John Rossheim

Consultant to free agents

[Rossheim.com](#)

For many free agents, 2001 means you've got nothing left to lose. So beg, borrow, or buy a used copy of one of these books for information, inspiration, or just plain diversion.

[Consulting for Dummies](#)

by Bob Nelson and Peter Economy
(Hungry Minds Inc., 1997)

Get back to basics with this ultimate compendium of checklists for the self-employed. Sure it's pedestrian, but so is your top priority today: to keep putting one foot in front of the other.

[Soloing: Realizing Your Life's Ambition](#)

by Harriet Rubin
(HarperCollins, 1999)

Hold your nose through the name-dropping, and you may glean useful insights into why you want to be a free agent in the first place. Rubin's book belongs on your bedside table.

[Free Agent Nation: How America's New Independent Workers Are Transforming the Way We Live](#)

by Daniel H. Pink
(Warner Books, 2001)

Zoom out to the big picture of free agency with the guy who knew when to fold his cards as Al Gore's speechwriter. Pink puts your daily grind into the context of what may be a major social trend of the 21st century.

[Big Kiss: One Actor's Desperate Attempt to Claw His Way to the Middle](#)

by Henry Alford
(Broadway Books, 2001)

Participatory journalist and nonactor Alford makes us all feel better by showing us how to capitalize on a humiliating work experience (write a book about it). Very funny.

[Jerry Maquire](#)

by Cameron Crowe
(Farrar Straus & Giroux, 2000)

Having trouble collecting consulting fees from deadbeat dotcoms? Look into the mirror and practice shouting "Show me the money!" with the aid of this screenplay, written by the screenwriter of *Almost Famous*, about an odd couple of free agents.

John Rossheim (john@rossheim.com) writes about free agents, privacy, travel, and almost anything else that pays the bills.

Colleen Aylward

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[The Heart Aroused: Poetry and the Preservation of the Soul in Corporate](#)

[America](#)

by David Whyte
(Doubleday/Currency, 1996)

A poetic look at spirituality in corporate America -- yes, it really does exist.

[It's Only Too Late If You Don't Start Now: How to Create Your Second Life at Any Age](#)

by Barbara Sher
(Delacorte Press, 2001)

This book offers a straightforward, honest look at disruptive life change and advice for making the best of it.

[The Power of Spirit: How Organizations Transform](#)

by Harrison Owen
(Berrett-Koehler, 2000)

This book explores how spirit can transform a working environment full of toxic emotions into a place that is fulfilling for everyone involved.

[The Attention Economy: Understanding the New Currency of Business](#)

by Thomas H. Davenport
(Harvard Business School Press, 2001)

Davenport introduces a very thorough understanding of where business is headed in the near and long-term future and how it will affect today's companies.

[The Experience Economy](#)

by B. Joseph Pine, James H. Gilmore, and B. Joseph Pine II
(Harvard Business School Press, 1999)

This book provides a glimpse into the future business world from a marketing point of view.

Colleen Aylward is president and founder of Devon James Associates Inc., a fast-growing recruiting firm based in Seattle. She's played the talent game for some of the best-known Internet companies in the Pacific Northwest, including Amazon.com and Visio Corp.

Anni Layne (alayne@fastcompany.com) is the Fast Company senior Web editor. For a comprehensive list of books featured in Fast Company, visit the [library](#) in Fast Company Learning.

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June 2001

Pink-Slip Blues

The psychological repercussions of layoffs may sabotage downsized employees, survivors, and companies for years after a cutback, says author Ruth Luban. Here, she offers tips for softening the emotional blows of a pink slip.

by **Anni Layne**

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A few years ago, during the talent war's most reckless campaigns, HR directors desperate to stem the dotcom migration molded retention packages that included inflated salaries, stock options, and referral incentives. As even routine hires began demanding signing bonuses and generous vacation allowances, recruiters' vocabulary consisted of only two words: attract and

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Today, the very same employee who joined a company in 1999 because of its investments in talent is learning that allegiance takes a backseat to profits during a downturn and that loyalty does not necessarily produce a return on investment.

"Laid-off workers are left feeling terribly betrayed by employers who once treated them like family," says career counselor and consultant Ruth Luban, author of *Are You a Corporate Refugee?: A Survival Guide for Downsized, Disillusioned, and Displaced Workers* (Penguin, 2001). "Oftentimes, the guy who received a raise nine months ago for demonstrating outstanding teamwork is let go not because he's doing a bad job, but because the company needs to cut. When those layoffs are done without compassion, employees leave feeling angry, confused, and disoriented."

Those emotions, if allowed to fester, can derail job searches, sabotage promising interviews, and foster feelings of professional distrust. Vindictive employees may also unleash violence and sabotage on a former boss before heading out the door, striking fear into the hearts of all survivors.

The message boards on Fucked Company and WetFeet.com support the theory that bitter employees are outspoken employees and that smart companies practice compassionate layoffs. They also suggest that downsized employees often don't anticipate or appreciate the emotions that inevitably follow an adverse career change; they fall back on anger because it's comfortable and cathartic. But it's also terribly ineffective after a certain point, says Luban, who also sees corporate casualties flee from their feelings by launching immediate job searches.

"The most difficult step," she says, "is admitting the truth to yourself: 'I've been laid off.' Then you must process the situation and begin choosing from the inside out. Instead of asking 'Who wants me the most?', do some soul searching and ask, 'Where do I

reckons with what has changed in the world of careers -- and what hasn't.

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choose to go?' To move on, you must internalize that locus of control."

Luban has identified five stages of "The Refugee Experience" -- emotional steps that downsized employees move through on their way to a new job or a new calling. Here, she explains each phase and offers advice for progressing successfully toward a better future.

On the Brink

Your CEO just announced disappointing second-quarter results, hired a team of "efficiency experts," and called a staff meeting for next Friday. That can mean only one thing: You will accomplish absolutely nothing in the next week as you and your coworkers wring your hands, wipe your brow, and debate various layoff scenarios to the point of paralysis.

Luban calls that hysteria before the storm "On the Brink" and advises employees concerned about their future to resist watercooler gossip and pink-slip predictions. Instead, she encourages a period of preparation and adjustment that includes updating your résumé, organizing your files, calculating your finances, and generally putting your life in order. She says that the potentially downsized should research the process for converting a 401(k) into an IRA, extending health-care coverage, and reducing personal debt -- all while they're still on the clock.

"Move from a reactive mind-set to a proactive one by first recognizing that your job could go away tomorrow and then by getting ready to leave that paycheck behind," Luban says. "Most people are so overwhelmed with their job that they neglect their own personal priorities. You must think selfishly to survive today."

But not everyone sees the storm clouds forming. If your company is remaining tight-lipped about profits and strategies, surf Web sites like [Fucked Company](#) and [WetFeet.com](#) for the inside scoop on your employer, Luban advises. "Honor your intuition," she says. If things don't feel right, they probably aren't. And knowing is half the battle.

Letting Go

Once the guillotine has fallen, laid-off employees often feel angry, hurt, and betrayed. Luban says that's natural. Bitch, moan, complain, and cry to your

heart's content.

"Don't avoid those feelings or begin pushing even harder toward a new job," she says. "Grief will sabotage your interviews if you don't work through it first. If you're feeling at half-mast, you will approach each interview as another potential rejection, and recruiters will tear you apart."

Misery loves company. And recovery seldom begins in isolation. So Luban suggests seeking a career counselor or joining a support group -- and, no, pink-slip parties don't count. Take a few weeks to work through your feelings before jumping back on the career boards, but don't allow your healing time to become an unsightly résumé gap.

"Whether you're traveling through India or bumming around San Francisco, the grief will remain if you don't meet it head-on," Luban says. "It's too risky to take a long sabbatical right now, so you must find support close to home and look inside yourself for solutions."

The Wilderness

Once you're ready to start writing cover letters and practicing handshakes again, you must learn to compartmentalize the job search, so that it doesn't dominate every waking hour. Begin by assembling an interim structure for your day that includes rituals for exercise, healthy eating, adequate sleep, and reflection. Luban recommends starting a journal -- a place to vent about the agony and ecstasy of the process every day.

"When we're working, our jobs define the structure of our day," Luban says. "When that structure has been lost, people feel lost and helpless. They panic because they don't know how to deal with uncertainty. If you create an interim schedule, you can release yourself into the uncertainty of unemployment, because there is some structure to your day."

Set aside four or five hours each day for researching, applying, and interviewing for jobs, and use the remaining time to "wander," Luban says. Rather than living panic-filled days at Kinko's, schedule time to stroll through a park, visit a museum, or swim laps at the gym.

"When people aren't looking, that's exactly when the connections and awakenings happen," Luban says. "There's a lot going on internally, and wandering allows for internal breakthroughs -- if you stop clutching and driving long enough to remember who you are."

Seeing the Beacon

The self-evaluation and job-search processes started in "The Wilderness" begin to pay off when you feel a sense of calling and can identify the job, industry, or position that will make you happiest. "You finally get a clear sense of what you are and what's next," Luban says about the fourth step identified in *Are You a Corporate Refugee?*: "Seeing the Beacon."

"Watch out for false starts," Luban warns. "Some people become so fearful of the unknown that they settle for the first thing that comes along. You simply can't let dwindling resources or outside pressure force you into another job that's bound to end badly."

In the New Land

This final stage of the "Refugee Experience" represents a new beginning that Luban celebrates cautiously. "Don't just give yourself over to your new job," she warns. "Build resilience. Hold your boundaries. Own yourself."

In short, never allow yourself to become a corporate victim again. That doesn't mean you shouldn't allow yourself to be fired or downsized again. It means you shouldn't allow yourself to place faith in continuity again. "Disruption and unpredictability are the constants in careers from this day forward," Luban writes on her Web site, [Corporate Refugees.com](http://CorporateRefugees.com).

"If we allow companies to oppress us, they will," she says. "But if we maintain our boundaries and push the oppressors back, we will remain strong. You can't be a victim without an oppressor."

Anni Layne (alayne@fastcompany.com) is the senior Web editor for fastcompany.com. Learn more about Ruth Luban on the [Web](#).

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How to Mend Your Parachute

Like many things, the notion of career planning and job hunting has changed dramatically since September 11. Here, acclaimed author Richard Bolles offers five strategies for finding meaningful work in the face of an economic recession and a national crisis.

by Anni Layne Rodgers

Read on: [Hard Times, Smart Strategies: 89 Ways to Stay Fast During a Slowdown](#)

On June 2, 1976, a newspaper reporter named Don Bolles was assassinated in a Phoenix parking lot on his eighth wedding anniversary. The victim of a fatal car bomb, Bolles was targeted by a local mobster unhappy with the reporter's investigative stories about fraud and corruption -- articles that capsized political careers, derailed businesses, and targeted organized crime in Arizona. Bolles, 47, was a husband, a father, and the brother of acclaimed career advisor, Richard N. Bolles, author of [What Color Is Your Parachute?: A Practical Manual for Job-Hunters and Career-Changers](#).

On September 11, when Richard Bolles learned that

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four commercial airliners had slammed into the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and the Pennsylvania countryside, he immediately sympathized with the families and friends of people killed in those terrorist attacks. "I know that grief," he says. "You live in the land of might-have-been and wish-I-had." After witnessing the horror, Bolles also knew his job would never be the same again. He was right.

Like many things, the notion of career planning and job hunting has changed dramatically since September 11. No longer is changing your career about finding a new employer; it's about redefining your priorities and ambitions, Bolles says. It's about coming to terms with what matters most.

"September 11 exposed the repairs we must make in our lives," Bolles says. "So often we take our loved ones for granted as we become enraptured in our work and our jobs. September 11 helped us see that now is the time to appreciate our loved ones, to listen closely to them, and to begin important conversations with them about work, family, and balance. Don't wait for a cataclysm; do it now."

This fall, Bolles updated his [Web site](#) with advice about job hunting after September 11. Though his guidance borrows heavily from the totally rewritten 2002 edition of *Parachute*, Bolles concedes that the market has shifted significantly since he finished writing the new book earlier this year. Here, he offers five fresh tips for finding meaningful work in the face of an economic recession and a national crisis.

Don't Believe the Hype

Despite aggressive advertising campaigns launched by sites like Monster and Hot Jobs, Bolles says only 4% of job seekers actually land a position through the Web. *What Color Is Your Parachute 2002* also reports that 74% of job hunters experience some degree of failure while trying to apply for a position online and 40% are ultimately unable to apply due to broken links, poor navigation, or stale information. Some 45% of those who do submit a résumé and cover letter in response to an online job posting never hear back from the hiring company at all, he says.

"The statistics are depressing, but necessary," Bolles says. "If you know the

and Donald O. Clifton
(The Free Press,
2001)

[What Color Is Your
Parachute?: A Practical
Manual for Job-Hunters
and Career-Changeers](#)

by Richard Nelson
Bolles
(Ten Speed Press,
2000)

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cold, hard facts, you will adapt your job hunt accordingly. But if you only pursue online job leads because you think the Web works for everyone, you risk losing your self-esteem, which is the worst thing that can happen to an applicant during the job hunt."

Try Plan B

When the standard job hunt doesn't work anymore, Bolles suggests a weekend homework assignment: Perform a career inventory. First, ask yourself whether you most enjoy working with people, data, or things. Then begin listing the skills, interests, and working conditions that would comprise your ideal job. As you analyze your unique career criteria, Bolles says a compass will emerge to guide your job search in the most logical, fruitful direction.

"This is a method that requires more time and more effort, which is why people avoid it," he says. "By engaging in this introspective exercise, you're already a step ahead of the competition. You've identified a set of transferable skills that will help you find a role outside of your current industry or job description."

Be Picky

Once you determine the elements that constitute your dream job, begin pinpointing industries and companies that fit your parameters, Bolles says. Don't settle for less than your ideal position. And don't allow discouraging economic news to temper your fire.

"Job hunters typically run around like chickens with their heads cut off," Bolles says. "They try to prove they can do 1,014 different jobs without realizing that employers steer clear of scattered applicants. Employers want someone who is really good at one thing. The trick is knowing what that *one thing* is, but you can't be everything to everyone."

Jump the Gun

The traditional job hunter sniffs out a fresh trail of help-wanted postings. The successful job hunter doesn't wait for a vacancy sign to appear in the window. She identifies the industries most attractive to her, researches top companies

in those fields, and then finds contacts at those companies. Regardless of whether the companies are officially hiring, Bolles says the successful job hunter arranges to meet with executives for information interviews -- a sure-fire job-hunting strategy offered in the first edition of *Parachute*.

"If you start out with *you*, and not the job market, you won't have to contort yourself to fit a job description," Bolles says. "A worker who is in a job, a place, and a field that he enjoys will always outperform a worker who settled. The key is attitude and enthusiasm."

In addition, Bolles says, the best jobs are seldom advertised to the outside world. Often, companies begin looking for replacements internally or find themselves too inundated with work to post a classified ad immediately. If you walk into a company during the hiatus period after an employee's departure, you may be the only applicant for a job that hardly anyone knows about, he says.

Don't Back Down

Congratulations, you've landed a sweet job with a fast company. Now, where else can this position take you? Which employers are seeking your skills? Who will hire you next? When will you move on?

Especially since September 11, workers everywhere are learning that nothing is certain anymore. Jobs are liquidated, staffs are reduced, and companies change hands with little or no warning. The talent market is in upheaval.

"I know one guy who turned on the radio during his commute to work and found out he lost his job," Bolles says. "The day you start your present job is the day you should launch your hunt for the next gig. Don't wait until you get fired to think about your job hunt. Everyone who holds a job now should be asking about the next step."

Anni Layne Rodgers (arodgers@fastcompany.com) is the senior Web editor for Fast Company. Learn more about Richard Bolles [on the Web](#).



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Readers respond to our Web-exclusive series about layoffs with harrowing anecdotes, harsh criticism, and hard-boiled advice. Join the debate online now.



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📌 FAST TAKE

A weekly roundup from the Web and

Read on: [Hard Times, Smart Strategies: 89 Ways to Stay Fast During a Slowdown](#)

It ain't pretty, and it ain't avoidable. The topic of layoffs has dominated mainstream media for much of 2001 as companies ranging from Daimler-Chrysler to Lucent Technologies have announced cutbacks, downturns, and buyouts with increased regularity. From CNBC's daily NASDAQ vigil to the *Wall Street Journal's* [dotcom body count](#), business news has begun to resemble the obituary section of a local newspaper

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more and more. As the facts, figures, and frustrations pile higher each day, high-impact players and leading companies are slipping into a state best described as uncomfortably numb.

This fall, Fast Company weighed in on the layoff coverage with a Web-exclusive series and a contest -- the [Lap\(top \) of Luxury](#) competition to win a Dell Inspiron 4000 Notebook computer. Our [Hard Times](#), [Smart Strategies](#) series set out to interrupt the gloom and doom long enough to offer some real strategies, tools, and inspiration for cutting back and staying fast.

Our stories about layoffs, job-search priorities, and sabbaticals provoked a firestorm of response from our readers, who debated the realities and opportunities of today, and offered alternative solutions and personal stories. Here is what they had to say about moving forward in backlash times.

[10 Hard Truths About Layoffs ...](#)

... that your father never told you. Truth #1: There are worse things than losing a job -- like staying in a bad job for "security."

Thank You, Sir. May I Have Another?: "I was laid off twice in 15 months, and both layoffs were the best things that ever happened to me. I left corporations and found a job at a small company. I finally feel appreciated and recognized for my abilities. If I were laid off tomorrow, I would simply start networking; I'm convinced that I would have a better job in less than two months."

-- [Barbara Mathieson](#)

Downhill From Here: "After being laid off, your next job *will* be worse -- however much you would like it to be different. You *will* have to settle for something less, because your next employer will only hire you for what you already know how to do. If you can afford to take off for a while, by all means do so. It is already too late to hurry; your best bet is an improving economy."

-- [Don Michaels](#)

Feeding Frenzy: "Feeding my soul is nice, but feeding my family is more important."

- ["It's My Party"](#) -- Lesley Gore
- ["You Can't Always Get What You Want"](#) -- Rolling Stones
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Cycle Harder: "As business cycles become more compact, we will be comforted (or discomforted) by the fact that one cycle follows another -- times of prosperity and times of layoffs alternate. To prepare for the coming cycles, become an outstanding leader -- be in demand to facilitate creative teams of motivated employees in driving change."

-- [Chuck Glover](#)

Dead or Alive?: "People have come to equate what they *do* with who they *are*. When they lose their job, they experience two out of the three forms of death: death of self-image and death of hope. In some unfortunate cases, the third form of death -- clinical death -- is also a consideration."

-- [E.L. Sopow](#)

[Smart Ways to Land Your Next Gig](#)

The good news: You've found a good job in a company that's built to last. The bad news: Lots of others are jockeying for the same position. Here are strategies to help you stand apart while everyone else is standing around.

An Assignment: "Break down your previous role(s) in terms of deliverables, and make sure you include even the most mundane tasks. Now rate yourself against those deliverables in terms of Liked, Disliked, Good At, Could Improve. What have just created is a primer for your new role."

-- [Greg Fields](#)

[How to Move Forward When You're Between Jobs](#)

Learn how to transform a layoff into a savvy sabbatical -- a time to recharge your batteries and learn new skills without sabotaging your résumé. Author Hope Dlugozima offers tips for taking six months off smart.

Student of Life: "Sabbaticals are nice if you don't have \$700 a month in student loans, car loans, and credit-card bills."

-- [Nick](#)

Foreign Currency: "If you really want to take an overseas sabbatical, it can be done without saving a year's salary. Just sit down and figure out how much money you need to live."

-- [Sarah](#)

Backyard Sabbatical: "You don't have to go to Greece or Russia. I certainly can't afford to take a sabbatical like that with a teenage son, a mortgage, two car payments, and the ever-present credit-card bill. But I have 'semiretired' for a while, clearing time to develop a business plan that I'm very excited about."

-- [Paul S.](#)

Old Habits, New Goals: "Just today, I turned down a job offer that would have taken me right back into the trap I worked so hard to escape last year! I'd like to say it was easy, but I'm still in the process of reinventing myself."

-- [Todd Hendrickson](#)

Vocation Vacation: "Sabbaticals are my product-development periods. They are times to do the research and writing, to advance the game to the next level, and to think about the solutions. Each sabbatical should leave you with more to offer your next employer or customer than you had when you left."

-- [Bo Newman](#)

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July 2001

20 (More) Ways to Slow Down Smart

Fast Company's Lap(top) of Luxury contest prompted an outpouring of ideas from readers about how to cope with tougher times. Read their strategies and tactics, along with some compelling personal stories -- and meet the winner of a Dell Inspiron 4000 Notebook computer.

by the readers of Fast Company

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FAST TAKE
A weekly roundup from the Web and

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The economy may be slowing down, but members of the Fast Company community are still fast on their feet -- and quick to share their wisdom. Last month, more than 1,700 people registered for our Lap (top) of Luxury contest. They read through a collection of articles that offered ideas and tactics for staying fast in slower times, and then submitted their own ideas. The reward: One community-minded participant would be selected as the winner of a [Dell Inspiron 4000 Notebook](#) computer.

So here's (some of) what you proposed -- 20 tips for building resilience and maintaining hope during the downturn, real advice from real Fast Company readers. And congratulations to [Bonnitta Roy](#), of Kent, Connecticut, winner of

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Wind in Your Sails

Reimagine the vision that got you started. That same vision will drive you forward. But you must remember what your vision looked like before reality filled in so many details -- details that act like barnacles and weigh down your ship. You might need to pull your boat up out of the water, scrape off those contingent details, and perhaps repair the warped hull. That clear, pared-down vision is what drives your passion for the work and what generates the creativity you need. Like a clean hull, your reexamined vision will suffer less drag as it sails through the waters -- muddy or clear.

-- **Bonnitta Roy**
Kent, Connecticut

Take the Curve

Slowdowns are like winding highways. You need to brake into the turn to stay in control and to accelerate out of it for maximum efficiency. So when the economy slows down, take a break and learn a new skill. Catch up on your reading. Reintroduce yourself to your family and friends. Then be prepared to accelerate out of the turn when things pick up. You'll be at the front of the pack during the next up cycle!

-- **Brett Kottmann**
Centerville, Ohio

Million-Dollar Smile

Keeping your energy level at its peak is very difficult when you've been "pink-slipped," but it's crucial to remain upbeat at certain times. The people you call for references and for interviews can hear depression and desperation in your voice. There will be days when you just don't feel like making more phone calls or arranging more meetings. Accept that you need a short break and do something good for yourself.

-- **Lydia Stark**
Vancouver, British Columbia

Be a Closer

Now is not the time to simply put in extra hours. Results count. Focus on accomplishing tasks and solving problems, not just putting time on the clock. The resolvers, closers, and self-improvers will be the last ones standing.

-- **Cory Butler**
Austin, Texas

Practice Makes Perfect

Slow times allow people to lose their professional and personal focus. Joe Lewis once said, "There is no such thing as a 'natural.' A natural dancer has to

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practice hard. A natural painter has to paint all the time. And a natural fool has to work at it." Success requires discipline, focus, and a supportive environment. Find those things, and you will find strength in weak times.

-- **Vance McMurray**
Woodbridge, Virginia

Become a Leader

Thriving in tough times means acting like a leader. Great leaders don't take a wait-and-see attitude, and they don't focus on problems and obstacles. They look at a tough economy as simply a *different* economy and put their plans in place accordingly.

-- **Sara McKinnon**
Dallas, Texas

Make It Happen

You will always remain promotable if you pursue opportunities in areas not normally staffed by people like you, or if you take projects that nobody wants and "make them happen." That kind of risk taking allows you to test and redefine your boundaries.

-- **Larissa Estrada**
El Paso, Texas

The Power of Networks

I cannot stress enough the importance of networks. The last job I got from a cold call was when I was 19 years old. I am now 36. I can trace every job I have had since back to the network of people that helped me land that first job 17 years ago.

-- **Sean Wheeler**
Redmond, Washington

Add Value to Your Personal Franchise

Never consider yourself unemployed. Instead, you are "consulting." There are always opportunities surrounding you. Some may be short-term cash propositions, while others may be long-term equity plays. Either way, use your time wisely.

-- **Michael Taus**
Beverly Hills, California

Keep Yourself Solvent, Employable, and Happy

Spend less than you earn. Learn to write proposals to create great work for yourself. Know your rights as an employee. Ask for a performance review. Keep your ego in check. Learn the work styles of your colleagues. Document everything you do. And keep your sense of humor!

-- **Jane Snyder**

Waterloo, Ontario

Say "I Love You"

After your exit interview, when you've received your final paycheck, traded handshakes, and walked out of the building, go look in the mirror. You will notice that nothing has changed. That person you see is just as valuable, efficient, and productive today as he or she was yesterday. Tell yourself, "I love you." Then ask yourself, "So what are you afraid of?"

Asking that may be the most freeing step you can take. It will force you to recognize that you do feel fear. If you go on in denial of that fear, you will never face it. If you never face it, you will never overcome it. The mirror chat with yourself is the best "boot to the head" that I know of.

-- **Richard Roberts**

Bremerton, Washington

Give More Than You Get

The best way to stay employed is to make sure that you are positively contributing substantially more than you are paid. Don't lose the focus of finding ways to make the company more profitable. Create your own projects, focus on value, and improve your value.

-- **Markus Hill**

Asheboro, North Carolina

Diversify Your Input

Go to the bookstore, pick up some magazines from a variety of fields, sit down with a cup of coffee, and peruse. Often, casual browsing is enough to get you thinking of different people in different industries or other companies in related industries in your town. This exercise helps me sharpen my résumé and see how the skills I have honed in my industry might entice a company in a different industry.

-- **Greg Kittinger**

Tulsa, Oklahoma

Goals, Goals, and More Goals ...

Start small. Seek out a networking event and set a realistic goal of collecting three business cards. You will walk away from the event with a sense of accomplishment. Benchmark the next event for five business cards -- or one relevant job lead.

-- **John Renolds**

Chicago, Illinois

Don't Settle

Don't -- I repeat -- don't take a job just because you are suffering a panic

attack about being laid off. You will experience the consequences and realize how productive you could have been during that downtime.

-- **Bryan Ward**

Los Gatos, California

Make It Your Job!

In any job, do more than is expected. Surprise your manager. And never turn down an assignment by saying, "That's not my job."

-- **Stuart Brogden**

Houston, Texas

Check Yourself

Take your annual goals and reorganize them in terms of what will make the company the most money. Then take your monthly and weekly to-do lists, and restructure them to reflect what you most want your division to achieve in the coming year. You'll be more effective as a result -- and more valuable by focusing on basics.

-- **David Horn**

New York, New York

Simple Words

Preparation + Opportunity = Luck. Every exit is an entry somewhere else.

-- **Chris Ward**

Findlay, Ohio

Add Some Spice to Your Life

Downturns can make your professional life feel stale. Stay productive and attentive by adding to your extracurricular life. Take on a second job or hobby, or start a project that you've put off. It's all about how you choose to spend your spare time and keep yourself enriched.

-- **James Dell**

Ottawa, Ontario

Generalist or Specialist?

If you hit the right mark, your specialty will help you build a reputation and a bank balance. But what if you choose the wrong niche? Today's economy is no different than the down cycles we see in every decade. Constantly upgrading skills, obtaining new business experience, and delivering value are what count in any economy. Adapt, learn, and do good work.

-- **Colin McGuire**

Calgary, Alberta

Sidebar: Bonnitta Roy

When Bonnitta Roy fled New York after 13 years of living there, she sought a quieter existence in the tucked-away town of Kent, Connecticut. After some time in the small town, her passion for the outdoors drove her to begin poking around the offices of Kent Horticultural Services, a homegrown landscaping company located on Main Street.

What she found inside was a mom-and-pop operation bursting at the seams -- and suffering under the weight of its own popularity. Growing from a local landscaper to a full-service design and building firm with top-notch clients across the state, Kent Horticultural Services desperately needed to reconcile its operational technology with its new workload. And Roy was just the ambitious New Yorker to meet the challenge head-on.

So Roy rolled up her sleeves and got to work. First order of business: order the shop's very first computers and teach its founders how to transform technology into great customer service. Next, Roy worked to implement a rudimentary operations system upon which the company could continue to build indefinitely. Today, Kent's plucky mom-and-pop shop is one of the largest full-service landscaping companies in the state. And it's preparing to unveil a Web-based tool that will allow clients to participate in the design and building process from across the city -- or the country.

Meanwhile, Roy has forged ahead with another challenging business proposition: a small company founded and operated by her and her husband, Serafino Bueti, called Treemobile LLC. Roy and Bueti's love of the land and business innovation helped them create a customer-oriented tree-moving service that fills the gap between landscape architects and nursery services. By relating directly to the customer without truckloads of subcontractors, Treemobile is carving a niche among Connecticut homeowners who want to help design their own landscaping. The killer app behind Treemobile is a unique variation on a tree spade that removes and replants very large trees. By mounting those machines on Volvo trucks, Roy and her husband have built a tool known throughout Connecticut as a "treemobile," rather than a tree spade -- suddenly, they are enjoying the same branding success as Band-Aid, Xerox, and Kleenex.

A loyal Fast Company reader since issue 3, Roy says that she adapts the magazine's principles to fit her off-center job in an off-center industry. Now landscaping is front and center as we congratulate Roy on her winning submission and thank her for contributing to the Fast Company community.

Read Roy's winning submission to the Lap(top) of Luxury contest [here](#).

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July 2001

Diaries of a Downturn

Four Fast Company readers open their private journals and share stories of disappointment, confusion, and resilience. Real accounts from a dog-day era of layoffs and cutbacks.

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The degrees of separation between you and a pink-slip victim decrease every day the NASDAQ dips below 2000. So chances are you will have a story to share -- a tale of free lunches canceled, expense accounts squashed, or coworkers downsized -- before the summer ends. Like it or not.

The community message boards on sites like [Vault](#) suggest that most of those stories are little more than bitter rants and retaliatory rages. The diary entries below are not those stories. These accounts are honest, personal, and real. Responses to our Lap(top) of Luxury contest, they show how real people are

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surviving this downturn. They also suggest alternatives to the hunker-down-and-suffer mentality pervading business today.

A Hell of a Year

Learn how to tend bar. That is the only tip I have for surviving a pinch. I am a classically trained actor who lived in New York for almost 10 years. When my engagement broke up last year, I wanted more than living hand-to-mouth, so I returned to my roots in Chicago. My first job entailed selling advertising for an extremely large company. Talk about a 180-degree turn!

I left that company for a dotcom that went out of business, and then joined another that was horrifyingly corrupt and another that just downsized 30% of its workforce, including yours truly. All of this in less than a year.

Now I am full of questions, not the least of which is this: Is it time to bring art back into my life full-force, even if that means taking on even more debt? On the positive side, this has been a lovely time for reflection. It is quite freeing in a way. Of course, the first large bill has not arrived yet, so the fear of God has not yet fully taken root.

-- **Dory Binyon**
Chicago, Illinois

The Laughter Factor

Our small multimedia and design business lost more than \$97,000 in revenue when Belgian speech-recognition company Lernout & Hauspie filed for bankruptcy in late 2000. The people you don't hear about when companies fold are the creditors who might never get paid. With no warning, we were out a large amount of money and our best client.

On the bright side, our company has formed strong personal relationships with many of the people who worked at L&H. Those people have brought a tremendous amount of fresh, new work to our studio since leaving L&H.

What I have learned from people -- no matter how fast, traditional, entrepreneurial, institutional, nonprofit, organized, disorganized, or good -- is that you have to focus on working with good people and on becoming a better person yourself. Actively choosing to work with clients, colleagues, and team



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members who make you laugh is perhaps the most important choice you can make.

-- **Caitlin Jewell**

Boston, Massachusetts

Distance Learning

Several years ago, my husband and I took a two-year sabbatical. We sold the house and cars, and then bought a 23-foot RV and a little trailer to tow a motorcycle, a canoe, and bikes. That experience changed the way we both view life. We learned how little you really need to make life livable.

No job since has taken priority over my personal life. I love my work, but if I stopped loving it, I would not hesitate to leave. Two years off the career path gave me the opportunity to think about where I was going. Although I had a successful career in not-for-profit administration, I felt that I needed a change. I returned to graduate school and studied what I liked -- no career goal in mind. I was "underemployed," earning a paltry amount, but school was a great challenge; money didn't matter so much.

I fell into the perfect career, thanks to the skills I developed in my courses. For the past five years, I've worked as an independent agent, developing content and designing education software. Recently, one of my clients offered me a permanent position that allows me to work from my home office. Talk about the perfect setup -- no commute, flexible hours, regular paychecks, and great benefits. And all of this during a downturn!

Don't put your future in any company's hands. If my job ends tomorrow, I'll just call up some of my old clients and networking buddies. And if it takes a while to land my next gig, I might take a trip in the meantime. Oh, yeah ... as a free agent, I also learned to save about 25% of what I make so that I can take those trips.

-- **June Wilson**

Smithville, Texas

Wish List

I got laid off right after I joined the ranks of the few, the proud -- the

homeowners. I panicked and took a computer-analyst position two weeks later. Fifteen months after that, I had an ulcer, hated my job, and found the only redeeming aspect of my position was being able to toilet-paper my boss's cube on his birthday. It was time for a change.

People say that dream jobs don't exist. They do. I know, because I found mine. For me, staying fast when the world was slowing down meant making a list. My list was the normal grocery-store variety -- what I wanted and what I would be willing to compromise on. What emerged was a job description for an online content position.

I was tempted by the dotcoms -- the money they offered and the foosball table in the playroom -- but I didn't bite. Now I work for a bank. I know what you are thinking: Boring! Nope. It's great. I write financial news, make our clients' experiences better, and inject a dose of creativity into an otherwise gray-flannel-suit world. The best part is that the bank accepts me on my terms. For me, staying fast when the world slowed down was all about making myself happy. Gotta go. It's time to write the news!

-- **Hallie Hoffman**

Charlotte, North Carolina

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