

# Laid Off? Now What Do You Do?

By Stephen Bucaro

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First of all, don't feel alone. The U.S. has lost 2.5 million net jobs since March 2001. The average jobless stint is now five months, and many people are leaving the unemployment statistic not because they found a job, but because they feel the situation is hopeless and have dropped out of the work force.

Where did the jobs go? Did they go to Mexico where the average hourly rate is \$2.17, compared to \$15.45 in the U.S.? Mexico is losing jobs to countries like Vietnam where the average hourly rate is 37 cents per hour, or Pakistan 34 cents, or China 24 cents. While the U.S. economy has been stagnant for the past three years, China's economy has experienced a 9% annual growth rate. The U.S. now has a \$20 billion trade deficit with China.

China alone, with a population of 1.3 billion, compared to 250 million for the U.S., can provide more low cost labor than this planet can ever absorb. At the same time, as some jobs are being exported other jobs are being automated out of existence. Remember when an attendant was required to pump gas into your car? Remember when a human teller was required to make a bank deposit? Those attendant and teller jobs have been long gone.

Now we're seeing self-checkout machines at discount stores, grocery stores, and even at the library. Say goodbye to millions of checkout clerk jobs. The buzz word for American business today is "productivity" - to produce the same amount or more with fewer workers. Many businesses have increased productivity by more than a third in the last four years. This is only the first wave of productivity increase. Millions more jobs will be lost as computers and automation are put to the task of eliminating jobs. It's the American way.

As an individual who has been laid off, what should you do? As stated previously, the average time required to find a new job is now five months. If you are a worker from an industry whose jobs are being exported or automated out of existence, your reentry into the work force could take much longer. You need to develop a plan for your financial survival for an extended period of time.

If your sources of income are less than your expenses, you need to adjust your standard of living. People accustomed to making purchases without a thought sometimes find it difficult to adjust their spending habits. You may be required to tap into savings or sell assets to remain financially viable. You may need to trade your car for an older model in order to get rid of the payments. You may need to sell your house to raise cash and rent an apartment until the economy improves.

You need to take care of yourself physically and mentally. Stick to an exercise program. Get involved in outdoor sports. You need to be looking sharp for job interviews. Keep up with current events, especially business news. You need to know what geographic areas and economic sectors are poised to provide opportunity.

Don't spend your days laying on the sofa in front of the TV snacking on junk food. Whether you get a pay check or not, you need to stay productively engaged in the economy. Even if the chance of actually getting a job in today's economy is slim, you need to stay out there, making contacts, ready to seize opportunities.

Now is the time to get more education or training. You don't have to train for a specific career. Any general business or technology training will give you an advantage. Even seemingly non-related training, like art classes, will get you off the sofa and out making contacts that might result in a job.

If you don't have the funds for education or training, become a volunteer. Volunteering will get you off the sofa and out making contacts that might result in a job. It's

not unusual for someone who starts out cleaning cages at the dog pound to end up keeping the books or managing the dog pound, and get experience that results in a high paying job at a corporation. The secret is being reliable and willing to take on responsibility.

As contradictory as it sounds, the worst part of a recession is the best time to start a business. During a recession, money to start a business is cheap and available. Low cost surplus and new business equipment is available. Skilled employees are plentiful and wages are reasonable. As the economy begins to pick up, established businesses are slow to gear back up to meet the demand. That leaves clients looking for new sources. If you are interested in starting your own business, contact the Small Business Administration for guidance.

The U.S. has lost 2.5 million net jobs since March 2001. If you are one of the individuals who has been laid off, you still need to stay productively engaged in the economy. While looking for a job, you can get more education or training, become a volunteer, or start your own business. Most importantly, don't spend your days laying on the sofa in front of the TV snacking on junk food. Take care of yourself.

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