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LETTERS; Tales From the Ranks of the Jobless

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To the Editor:

Re "Out of Work, and Too Down to Search On" (front page, Sept. 7) struck a chord with me. I've been out of work since February, when the small newspaper I wrote for laid off half its newsroom. I started off feeling optimistic that I'd soon be on my feet, and I still spend between one and nine hours searching classified ads and Web sites, but it's getting more disheartening by the day.

The worst thing, and what is less often mentioned, is the reaction I get from some of the still-employed. I've been told that my problem is that I'm not trying hard enough, or that I'm too picky.

Prolonged unemployment is a heavy enough burden on one's pride, but some days the added weight of the still-too-common social stigma it carries makes it a hard load to carry indeed.

Matt DeBlass
South Bound Brook, N.J., Sept. 7, 2009

To the Editor:

I was laid off in 2002 in the tech bust, and I couldn't move because my husband has a stable job. So I volunteered for the Democrats, focused on the teenager and waited for the economy to come back. I'm still waiting.

Now, I'm one of the thousands applying for a handful of decent jobs, and my experience is almost worthless. I have three technical degrees and no interest in getting another. I'm not eligible for any kind of unemployment assistance.

I'm getting a divorce. My income is zero, and I'll have to buy individual health insurance soon. I want work and I'm trying to find it. But with my résumé, those offers aren't going to come.

Where am I in all these government unemployment statistics?

Sue Radford
Fort Collins, Colo., Sept. 7, 2009

To the Editor:

There is yet another hidden sector of unemployed: freelancers.

The trend of keeping small staffs and farming out other work has created a vast working class with no benefits and few rights.

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A freelancer whom I know worked for a company for nearly two years, then one day, just was not called in. No explanation.

Many people who worked full time but were laid off will not apply for unemployment benefits because of the effect it might have as they now look for freelance jobs. In fields like graphic design, for example, workers feel they need to present an image of always being in demand, even during slow periods. You'll rarely find a designer who admits to a slow period, or to being unemployed.

Jan Fisher
Forest Hills, Queens, Sept. 7, 2009

To the Editor:

For frustrated job seekers, there is often a vicious cycle of negative attitudes negatively affecting interview outcomes. As a career consultant (and a woman in her 50s), I know that there are strategies that can help.

Usually, the first impression is one's résumé, and it should be written so that it's easy for the hiring manager to see that you're qualified for that specific position. Each interview should be prepared for in detail, practicing aloud and focusing on appearance.

It's important for job seekers to get professional help early. Many states offer free assistance, like California's Employment Development Department, which sponsors groups in which job seekers collaborate, inviting professional speakers and helping one another.

Age discrimination exists, but often it's a perception that our thinking, behavior, level of energy and enthusiasm, and appearance may be out of date. This is something we can control.

And for Rick Alexander, who in your article said that seeking a job was like asking that cheerleader for a date and being repeatedly rejected: choose your targets wisely. Apply only for positions for which you are qualified.

Mauri Schwartz
San Francisco, Sept. 7, 2009

To the Editor:

One job seeker in your article, Ray Rucker, age 62, said that when he was being interviewed for a job with a retail chain, he was asked how soon he planned to retire. I find that discriminatory under the Age Discrimination in Employment Act. If I had been in Mr. Rucker's place, I would have asked (diplomatically) whether the executive was referring to my age. This might have led to an open discussion about the issue.

For example, older workers are more stable and reliable and don't engage in job-jumping.

Ruth Curtis
New York, Sept. 7, 2009

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