

**Custom closet design
is at your fingertips!
Click here!**



ajc.com
Today's Paper ▾
Monday
Tuesday
Wednesday
Thursday
Friday
Saturday
Sunday
News
Metro
Sports
Business
Opinion
Arts
Travel
Living
@issue
Homefinder
Jobs
Gwinnett
Front page
image
Full index
Nation / World ▾
Metro ▾
Business ▾
Sports ▾
Living ▾
Opinion ▾
Travel ▾
Health ▾
Your Money ▾
Buyer's Edge ▾
Jobs ▾
Cars ▾
Homes ▾
Classifieds ▾
AccessAtlanta
Entertainment ▾
Events ▾
Music ▾
Movies ▾
Theater & Arts ▾
Restaurants ▾
Recreation ▾

Anyone can find a job --- really

Focus, flexibility key to hunting in tough market

Amy Lindgren - Knight Ridder Newspapers
Sunday, November 2, 2003

We keep hearing that this is a tight job market, with some people out of work for as long as two years.

I agree that things don't look great. But that's as far as I'm going. You can call me a Pollyanna, but I will stand firm on the message I have been giving for the last eight years in my jobs column for the St. Paul [Minn.] Pioneer Press: There are jobs out there, and you can get one.

Even if you accept this rule, there's a chance you won't like its corollary: If you don't have a job, it's your fault.

Ouch. Keep reading and you may agree with at least part of my thinking.

But, first the caveats: Workers with physical and mental disabilities and illnesses, people with criminal records and people with extraordinary caregiver responsibilities are exempted from the "get-tough" tone of this article. For a variety of reasons, job search is exponentially more difficult for these people, and they usually need more than personal resolve to get back in the market.

If you do not belong to these groups but you are unemployed, grit your teeth and read on. I'll use my own experiences to explain how I came to this point of view.

Before I opened my job search company in 1985, I worked at more than 50 jobs and started and closed two solo businesses. Most of the jobs were part time, and I needed two or three at a time to make an income. Some ended well, but I was also fired from some and laid off from others.

Sometimes, readers who don't know this background write to say that I don't understand how difficult it is to make ends meet or to look for work. They're wrong on that point, but they are right when they say I don't know what it's like to be unemployed.

I have never been unemployed. Through a combination of poor advice and my own ignorance, I didn't know about unemployment payments when I was struggling to make ends meet. Without that option, I was forced to find a new job immediately each time I lost a job. This was during the early 1980s, when, I have since learned, the national unemployment rate hit 10 percent.

How did I do it? By not being choosy. By streamlining my expenses so I could afford to not be choosy. By partnering with others to share housing and food costs and by buying used clothes and cars. I couldn't get a credit card, though I tried many times. Today I'm glad about that, as I would probably still be paying for pizzas I ate two decades ago.

I had two huge advantages that you may not have: I had no dependents. And I had good health.

With these assets, I could work on the third shift, I could do physical labor and I could bike between jobs when my car was down.

The point isn't that I was tougher than people who are out of work. Rather, I was more

); //-->



Yellow Pages

Search ajc.com
Enter keyword:

Search our **Stacks**
archive of staff stories
back to 1985.

Personals
ajc services
Archives
Today's paper
Obituaries
Advertising
Tickets
Subscribe
Teacher aids
Customer service
Sitemap
E-mail News
Sign up for our FREE newsletters:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• News• Sports• Business• Travel Deals
Browser tip
Make ajc.com your homepage:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Directions
ajc guides
Schools
Visitors
ajc stores
Gifts & Guides
Pages
Photos
Posters & Books
Reprints

focused. It didn't occur to me that there was any alternative but to keep pushing ahead, so my energy wasn't divided.

That might be counted as a third advantage.

So, what are your advantages? Perhaps you have patience and a good voice --- there's a telemarketing job waiting for you. Maybe you have a good throwing arm and a reliable car -- - how about a paper route? If you're meticulous and physically fit, you can clean houses.

Am I kidding? Absolutely not. These jobs may not be your ideal, but they are almost always available, in cities all over the country. You don't have to take one of them, but remember: If you do not belong to one of the groups mentioned earlier, and you are unemployed, it's by choice.

And guess what? There's nothing wrong with that choice --- if you can afford it.

But if you can't afford it, you have to get a job. Start by getting what you can, as soon as you can. If it doesn't pay enough, cut back expenses or pick up something else.

If you absolutely can't get a job, stop trying and earn money some other way. Mow lawns, take neighbors on errands, make crafts. Just don't give up. The only wrong answer is to ignore the problem. It will not go away, and neither will your bills.

I am often asked what job seekers should do in a tight job market. The truth is, the steps for a good job search are the same in any kind of market, but the intensity with which you apply the steps may differ.

Following are four concepts to keep in mind as you conduct your job search:

> 1. Stick with the basics. In any market, your job search should be consistent, creative and productive.

In a consistent job search, the seeker chooses a new job or industry, identifies the people and companies to contact, and crafts the story to tell those people (creates a resume and interview answers, for example). Every effort in the job search is developed toward this focus, and no effort is lost going for jobs outside the focus. The trick is to not make the focus so narrow that it becomes unrealistic.

"Creativity" in this case does not mean sending resumes stuffed into shoes. That old "foot in the door" pun is way old. Rather, a creative search requires the job seeker to think about the people and companies on the target list. At what conferences are you likely to meet the company managers in person? What customer service problems are the companies trying to solve? How can your experience play a part in that solution? When you think creatively, you increase your contacts as well as your effectiveness with those contacts.

A productive job search is just that: productive. Track your efforts and set standards. Your situation is too unique for me to give a blanket rule, but, in general, anyone who sends out dozens of resumes and receives no responses is not being productive.

Your goals should include a certain number of outbound calls or visits or letters each week, resulting in a certain number of responses. And a certain number of those responses should result in a job interview, with a certain number of interviews resulting in an offer or two.

Put some numbers in the blanks and track your progress for a few weeks. If you're not coming close to your goals, chances are you need to adjust your approach.

> 2. Review the big picture. Why are you looking for a job? Most people will say they need an income. How much money and why? Remember that in transition, cash flow is king. It's not the amount of money you make, but when you get paid that matters.

It's a critical mistake to spend down your savings while turning away opportunities that don't seem to fit on a career path. A career is not something you can eat.

If you need to take a position outside your field, bide your time by staying current in your chosen area; you'll have another chance to get back in the game.

On the other hand, if your career path is your primary life goal, restructure other areas of your life to accommodate this goal.

> 3. Make the hard choices. If you can't get the job you want, take a different job. If you can't afford to keep your house, sell it and use the equity to start over in a less expensive lifestyle. If you can't afford to live alone, get a roommate.

Go back to the big picture question and ask yourself why you're looking for a job.

Then evaluate your job search so far. If you're not getting results and you've been consistent and creative, it might be time to take a lesser job or even a series of part-time jobs.

> 4. Pick a date to be re-employed. Give yourself time to get your ideal job --- say, three months. At that point, use your results to decide if you should get a part-time job while continuing the hunt or if you should take a different job and put your ideal job on hold. Set a date to be back at work, whatever path you choose.

A word of warning: If you take this advice and end up with a different job from what you had envisioned, do not allow yourself to brood about the job you didn't get. Take pride in the job you have and focus your attention on the future.

Amy Lindgren, the owner of a career-consulting firm in St. Paul, Minn., can be reached at alindgren@pioneerpress.com.

Illustrative drawing of the machine that examines eyes with the word 'Employment' viewed through the lenses. /
VERNON CARNE / Staff

 [EMAIL THIS](#)

 [PRINT THIS](#)

 [MOST POPULAR](#)

[SUBSCRIBE TO AJC](#)

[Advertise with us](#)

[home](#) | [nation & world](#) | [metro](#) | [sports](#) | [business](#) | [living](#) | [opinion](#) | [travel](#)

By using [ajc.com](#) you accept the terms of our [Visitor Agreement](#). Please read it.

Questions about your privacy? See our updated [Privacy Statement](#).

Interested in reprint permission? See our [Permissions Policy](#).

© 2003 [The Atlanta Journal-Constitution](#)