

## To Our Readers

**W**hen you are laid off, the first questions that come up are “Why me?” and “Now what am I going to do?” A layoff is usually a blow to our self-esteem and confidence. There is a feeling of guilt; as if you did something wrong. You wonder what others will think. If it takes longer than you expect to find work, it gets worse and other questions arise, like “What’s wrong with me?” and “Will I ever find a job?”

Being laid off is a traumatic experience for most people. The obvious challenge is finding new work, ideally work that is a great fit with your skills and experience. Most job search books deal with this part only. What they rarely address are the emotional ups and downs that every unemployed worker faces in some way.

A layoff is a loss—of a job, of an income, of security, of relationships at work, of structure in your life, of an identity, of a sense of making a contribution. Sometimes our relationships with those closest to us, our families and friends, are strained by misunderstandings. We react to the loss of a job in a way that is similar to any other loss we may encounter in life. Although each of us goes through our own unique experience, it is important to realize that emotional swings following a loss are normal. You are most definitely not alone.

### Why High Tech?

When we started researching this book, the high-tech sector was experiencing a severe meltdown. Over a period of a few years starting in mid-2000, many thousands of workers were laid off worldwide and the job market was inundated with highly skilled workers who could not find work.

High tech is a volatile sector, even in the best of times. During the boom of the late 1990s, companies were clamoring for skilled workers. Even then, changes in technology and the ups and downs of individual companies created upheavals that cost thousands of capable people their jobs.

The beginning of the new millennium brought a major downturn that caused an unexpectedly difficult and challenging time for many people working in the technology sector. This high-flying industry, the envy of many, fell rapidly and took years to recover. The individuals we interviewed are just a few of the tens of thousands of highly skilled workers who lost their jobs and had difficulty finding new work that suited them.

What happens when the industry leaves you, as opposed to you leaving the industry? For most people it was a very difficult experience, in a very different job market, one that most high-tech workers had not experienced in their lifetime. These are workers who usually moved seamlessly from one position to another, workers who got job offers when they already had a job. Not only was unemployment new to them, they also found themselves searching for work in a market that had few, if any, jobs for them. Much high-value talent and experience suddenly had no productive outlet. Some people found work only to be laid off again. Large numbers of very skilled workers were still unemployed or underemployed over five years later. How could they succeed after so much failure? Any industry is susceptible to a downturn at any time. What lessons are there for workers who get hit by the next inevitable convulsion?

We wrote this book to give high-tech workers hope, inspiration and encouragement because we saw so many excellent and highly qualified workers unemployed and frustrated by their inability to land work in a reasonable period of time, during the high-tech bust. When they could not find work, they were upset, disheartened and downcast. They felt dejected and they had difficulty seeing a time when they would once again be gainfully employed.

The reality is that in the midst of this industry downturn, in a job market that was so frustrating and discouraging, some people *did* find work—not just any job, but work that fit them well. We wanted to tell people about the success stories. We wanted to help them believe in themselves again. We wanted them to know that they, too, would find their ideal work. It was just a matter of time, belief in themselves, and strategic action on their part.

This book is built around success stories. We interviewed people from different backgrounds in the high-tech industry and from various areas of North America. You are getting a unique glimpse into the private lives of people who have generously shared with you some of their deepest feelings, struggles and triumphs about their career transition and, in some cases, transformation. Our intention is to enable those who succeeded to talk to those who are searching, or who *will* be searching in the near future. Although our people all came from high tech, they offer inspiration, suggestions and practical tips to any professional, from any work background, who is looking for or contemplating new work.

Often we think no one else feels the way we do. We believe that we are totally unique and that our experiences are different from everyone else's. We feel isolated, and sometimes we isolate ourselves. It is only when we share our feelings with others in similar circumstances, and listen to others, that we learn that the exact opposite is true. We learn that although each of our stories is unique, our feelings, our challenges, our journeys are all similar. Learning from others provides inspiration. The "light goes on" and we get those "aha" moments that speed things up and enable us to break through our barriers.

Our interest in the topic has personal and professional roots. The book was Anita's idea. Both she and her husband, Kevin, were laid off in the first two years of the slump. They know intimately what it is like to be suddenly without work, to have your income cut drastically, to face the enormous frustrations of a job search in a buyers' market, to find work only to be laid off again. Starting your own business has its own significant challenges that they also know only too well. As a volunteer and as a paid speaker and coach, Anita has worked hard to help other high-tech casualties move forward.

Lee is a career counselor and coach, with over thirty years of experience, and a published author. Dividing his time between coaching his own clients and working as a senior associate with one of the top career transition firms, Lee interacts daily with people seeking work that aligns what they do with who they are. He knows the positive impact that success stories can have on people who are still looking.

Nearly everyone we interviewed had "landed," had found a job, had started a business, or had gone back to school with a clear plan. That was one of our key criteria in selecting interviewees. What surprised us is that many of the people we interviewed "landed" multiple times while we wrote this book. They managed to find work that they loved to do, sometimes more than once, in a very difficult job market. How did they manage to do that? Some people are tempted to say that they were lucky. Perhaps. But we are inclined to believe that all of us can increase our chances of being "lucky."

Finding work is certainly work in itself and the more you apply yourself to the task, the better your chances of success. More important than just working harder, we believe in working smarter. Set yourself up to increase your chances of success. The stories of the people we interviewed are full of successful strategies that will help any job seeker work smarter. Another key component that emerged is trust, trust in yourself, and in God, the universe or whatever your belief system espouses. Trust is a big part of what keeps you going in difficult circumstances. Believe in yourself so that others will believe in you. Trust that things will work out. As many of our stories illustrate, events often unfold in interesting and unpredictable ways.

## They did it. You can do it.

Although these are very different people, with different backgrounds and different landing places, there is a lot of consistency in the wisdom of what they have to say. Look for stories of people with whom you can identify. What can you learn from them? Choose the strategies that suit you best, that are most likely to connect you with work you would love to do. There is no right way to go about finding work. There is only what works best for you.

If you are not a job seeker right now, you can still enjoy these stories of people who have succeeded in the face of adversity. Most of us love stories about underdogs who triumph. In the economic climate of the tech downturn, anyone looking for work has been an underdog.

### How to Use This Book

The book is constructed so that you can begin anywhere you like. There are stories and a summation of lessons learned. If you love the stories of people succeeding in the face of difficult circumstances, start with the stories. Sample them. It is difficult to read a lot of them at once because there is some repetition of experience. Jump around and find the ones that speak to you. In many of the stories, we have inserted comments that



emphasize something particularly important about that individual's experience. You will notice these as distinctive from their personal story because of the graphic "eye."

Each story has its own tips, but the final sections of the book—*Getting Through the Challenges of Unemployment* (page 183) and *Tips and Strategies for Bouncing to Success* (page 194) pull them all together in a synthesis of what we have learned, both about surviving and thriving, and about finding work. If that is what interests you most, start there and work back to the stories.

As we interviewed people, we found patterns of consistency in their varied emotional experiences. We have outlined the emotional swings that we have seen among these job seekers, and many others. Please do read this chapter (see *Stages of Emotion*, page 178). It is important to assist you in understanding the ups and downs experienced by most people who have been laid off.

If you want to know more about the context in which all of this happened, and the immensity of the impact on high-tech workers, read *The Best of Times and the Worst of Times* (page 19).

Almost all of the individuals we interviewed allowed us to use their real names. Only

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a few preferred that a pseudonym be substituted. Whatever their individual decisions—and we respected each of them—the experiences they shared with us are both valid and valuable. We intentionally did not mention names of companies or cities in order to respect the privacy of the interviewees and the companies that they have worked for—and because they may have served to distract the reader from stories that focus on the human and emotional experience of learning to bounce from a layoff to your ideal work.

Yours positively,

Anita Caputo and Lee Wallace

We loved hearing these stories and we would love to hear your story. As you, too, are successful in finding work you want, we invite you to contact us to tell us about your own success story.

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