

WORKING

EMPLOYMENT CLASSIFIED INSIDE

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Getting back to work after unemployment

By Patricia Kitchen
Tribune Newspapers

At 7:30 on a recent morning, Ken Waldmann was checking his voice mail and got both a thrill and a momentary jolt. A recruiter had left a message the day before telling him to go to a job interview that very morning at 9.

Laid off a year ago from a financial analyst position, Waldmann, 43, of North Bellmore, N.Y., was not about to miss this opportunity, so show up he did, without even knowing the names of the people he was scheduled to see.

Still, all went well. He was hired a week later as a senior financial analyst for a Bethpage, N.Y., distributor and has been on the job since the beginning of the month. A yearlong pause in his professional life—during which he played the dual roles of athletic director at a summer day camp and Mr. Mom at home—is over.

Although he says he relished the time with his two kids, "there was no crystal ball telling me when there was going to be a job. As much as you want to have a great attitude, you ask for how long—two years? Three years?"

For others like him with an eye on the calendar, relief, at least for some, may be on the radar screen. Although no one's envisioning a robust job market any time soon, there are signs of encouragement. Among them:

- Temporary staffing firms employed 50,000 more workers per day nationwide in the second quarter than the first, showing three consecutive quarters of growth—this after eight quarters of decline, according to the American Staffing Association.

- Employers expect a 12.7 percent increase in college graduate hiring this school year, according to the National Association of Colleges and Employers.

- With close to half the 149 Fortune 1000 executives polled saying their firms are understaffed, 29 percent said they expect to hire in the next six months, according to Cleveland-based executive search firm Christian & Timbers.

"The damming up of [staffing] demand these past two years is beginning to ease. Quality companies can't hold out forever," said Peter Felix, president of the Association of Executive Search Consultants, a Manhattan-based organization of retained search firms.

Despite continued uncertainty, "now's a good time for people to test the waters," said Gary Huth, labor market analyst for the New York Department of Labor. But be forewarned that some areas such as information technology and some financial areas may continue to lag. Also, employers "will still be looking at the least costly options" and that "generally, the higher salaries will come on board the slowest."

Many employers are going to be hearing, "I'm outta here," said Tony Lee, editor of CareerJournal.com. The Wall Street Journal's career site. A survey by CareerJournal found almost two-thirds of 300 respondents said once the market improves they are extremely likely to start or intensify their job searches.

Those who have kept current with their skills, networking contacts and industry happenings are the ones most primed to trade up, Lee says. And, it's critical to keep from projecting an attitude of "I've only been house-painting this past year." You can't let your survival mentality "color the way you approach companies."

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T. Shawn Taylor is on vacation.



Illustration by Michael Klein

Just shy of a promotion

Being an introvert can hold back a career. But even quiet types can learn to increase their visibility at the office.

By Chuck Green
Special to the Tribune

Rachel Michalski Mottaz's stomach was constantly in knots at work. Staff meetings were pure agony.

"I had to white-knuckle my way through them," said Michalski Mottaz, a former production manager for a live theater company in Chicago. "Most of my anxiety was with authority figures. At staff meetings, I got very intimidated by everyone and didn't speak up."

Her shyness, said Michalski Mottaz, wasn't just holding her back from speaking up in meetings. Ultimately, it was holding back her career: Unpleasant encounters virtually paralyzed her.

"If I had a bad confrontation with someone, I felt like I couldn't talk to that person again, or even look at them," she said. "If someone asked me to do something, my automatic thought would be I have to say yes, otherwise

that person would hate me."

Michalski Mottaz is far from alone. According to Bernardo J. Carducci, a professor of psychology and director of the Shyness Research Institute at Indiana University Southeast in New Albany, between 40 and 43 percent of adults believe they are shy. "That's huge," said Carducci, who has studied shyness for 25 years.

And while many people learn to mask their natural shyness at the office, others find that it works against them. As a result, shy people often are several rungs behind their more outgoing and sociable co-workers on the career ladder, Carducci says.

"Shy people experience 'off time,'" he explained. "They get promoted later, they make less money. One of the best predictors of career success is verbal skills. If you are too shy to demonstrate those skills, it will hold you back. You move along—it just takes you longer."

That may be especially true in today's workplace. With payrolls shrinking, employers are demanding that workers demonstrate soft skills as well as technical know-how. They want employees who can speak in front of groups, work in teams or with customers and inspire

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Shy-proofing strategies for the office

Selling yourself or your ideas is easy for many introverts. But it can be learned. Try these tips to overcome shyness in everyday office situations and meetings.

1. Practice "quick talk."

A common mistake that a shy person makes when they're at a business gathering is to find someone with whom they're comfortable and latch onto him for the duration.

"With quick talk, you speak to a lot of people for brief periods of time," said Bernard J. Carducci, director of the Shyness Research Institute at Indiana University Southeast. "That lets other people know that you're the kind of person who's willing to talk to a variety of people." When people recognize this, they may begin to seek you out, he added.

2. Prepare to make your point

If you're shy about expressing your thoughts in staff meetings, Chicago-based psychotherapist Kathryn C. Keller recommends advance preparation.

"Before you go into a meeting, what I call 'pad and points,'" said Keller. "Take a pad of paper and write down what points you want to make, then read them. After you rewrite them as succinctly as possible. When you get in the meeting, put the pad down in front of you and just say you have a point you like to make. Having it written down will help you explain it succinctly, rather than rambling."

3. Just say it.

"Shy people kill their own best ideas" because they're too self-critical, Carducci said.

Rather than dwell on the negative, "focus on what people are saying and then begin to use that as a basis to elaborate. Then you start brainstorming," he said.

4. Enlist the help of support

If public speaking is a part of your job but it makes you nervous, try out your speech in front of those you know can help, said Cheryl Carmin, associate professor and director of the Stress and Anxiety Disorders Clinic at the University of Illinois-Chicago.

You also may want to join a public-speaking group such as Toastmasters to develop your speaking skills.

5. Make the connection.

Link what you're doing to what your co-workers are doing.

"If you're working on a project and someone is talking about it, they're doing, you should say, 'That's real consistent or supportive of the kinds of things I'm doing.' Explain what you're doing and do your help if it's needed," Carducci said.

Furthermore, Carducci added, "Ask for feedback. That creates an open forum and lets people know how well you're doing something. Do this with your colleagues as well as your supervisor."

6. Volunteer for committees on projects.

"That makes people aware of

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