



Investing in Yourself

by Beverly Ryle

Whenever I'm away I return to a full inbox. Often a number of the emails I have received are from people over 50 who have been laid off and can't find work.

For months, in some cases years, these people have carried on discouraging job-search campaigns directed toward securing the kind of work they did before "the bottom fell out" of their professional lives.

They've reached the point where they feel they "can't buy a job" and are at their wits end as to what to do next.

At first I wondered, what do I say to these people? But then I noticed that none of them mentioned doing anything to create something new. No one said anything like, "I've started to explore web design," or "I've been taking a course in non-profit management," or "I've been studying one of the healing arts" on their own, through adult education classes, or at a community college.

They all recognized that the door to the work they'd previously done was closing, if not already closed, but gave no sign of moving toward another door. Their focus was on going back to what they once had, not on imagining a new workplace identity and incrementally making it a reality.

They didn't seem to be able to take comfort in the fact that, as the old proverb says, when one door closes, another opens.

Of course, other doors don't open automatically. You have to explore different hallways and jiggle a few handles to find the one that is right for you. You have to overcome your fear of having to develop new competencies before you can step over the threshold.

SURVIVOR GUILT

Last summer, I took a walk with a dear friend and long-time client who has very effectively re-invented herself and is happily employed in a new field.

She said that in the affluent suburban town where she lives, many of her friends and neighbors were dealing with their own or a spouse's long-term unemployment, and it was often awkward for her to be doing so well.

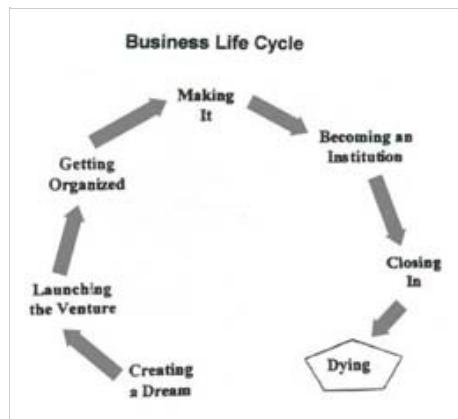
I reminded her that she was where she was because she had gone through an extensive process of self-discovery, education, and experimentation, and the position she enjoyed now was a direct result of the time, energy and resources she had devoted to formal courses, self-study, information interviews, volunteer work, etc.

"I feel so bad about what's happening to them," she said, "but you're right, I don't see them investing in themselves."

BUSINESS LIFE CYCLE

I am convinced that anyone looking for work needs to think and act like a small business owner.

This is because, despite all the talk from politicians about creating more of them, the "job" belongs to the Industrial Age, an era that has passed. What we need to learn how to do in the current era, the Information or Conceptual Age, is what business owners have been doing all along... create work for ourselves.



Entrepreneurs start with an idea, which they try out in a home office or a kitchen or a garage, and if it begins to take off, they develop an infrastructure that allows their business to grow and become profitable.

When they've "made it," reached the pinnacle of the business cycle (see above diagram), they face a very different sort of risk: complacency, competition and decline.

It's absolutely essential that they continually go back to their roots, to the "idea stage" from which new ventures spring. It's the only way to protect the business from the downward plunge of the backside of the business cycle.

The same is true for people seeking work, but sadly, the ones who are caught up in what I call "jobthink," the belief that just getting a job is going to solve all their problems, have not yet learned to think this way.

While they're employed, they invest most of their energy in doing the job and little or none in themselves.

When they're out of work, they repeat the pattern by devoting themselves to traditional, often fruitless, job-search practices instead of pursuing their own professional development.

BABY BOOMERS

Recently a segment on the PBS News Hour examined the potential impact on the economy as the baby boomers begin to qualify for Social Security.

Ted Fishman, author of [Shock of Gray](#), observed, "People are being pushed out of their primary employment before they get to Social Security age [resulting in] the highest unemployment in history for the 50-plus worker."

He went on to say that it is not enough anymore to think exclusively in terms of saving for retirement. We also need to protect ourselves against the very real possibility of "pre-mature" forced retirement or semi-retirement.

This means that, "The money you save over your lifetime may also be well invested if you invest in yourself and your skills. Instead of becoming a low-value worker in your fifties ... you will have high intellectual capital, high skills, so that there isn't the pressure to push you out of the work force."

Few people would seriously consider investing retirement funds in a passbook savings account because the return would not be adequate to meet future needs. Yet many, too many, continue on the path of trying to find work as a job-seeker, rather than create it entrepreneurially, even though the potential for long-term viability isn't there.

We routinely expend large amounts of our resources on our children's education, but not our own. Yet in a world where long-term employment in any particular job or with any one company is becoming less and less common, expanding our knowledge and improving our skills is the only basis for a secure future. This is where the new ideas and ventures which will continue sustain us in the "business" of making a living throughout our work life come from.

If you have read this article and don't know what to do next to begin to reinvent yourself, you are welcomed to email Beverly at bev@successonyourownterms.com

She will be happy to make herself available for a 30-minute complimentary session to discuss new possibilities.

[Visit Beverly's website](#)

Find out more about her book, *Ground of Your Own Choosing*, at www.beverlyryle.com/book

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Beverly Ryle is a regular contributor to this magazine and author of **Ground of your own Choosing**.

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