

# THE HUFFINGTON POST

## 10 Things You Probably Didn't Know About The Long-Term Unemployed: Your Sunday Morning Conversation



*Job seekers wait in line to enter a job fair hosted by JobExpo.com in Dallas on Jan. 29, 2014.*

Jason Linkins: 02/02/2014

Back in April, The Atlantic's Matthew O'Brien reported on a study, conducted by Rand Ghayad of Northeastern University that categorically confirmed that the long-term unemployed have had it so rough since the economic crisis because companies with available jobs have been systematically discriminating against them in hiring decisions.

Per O'Brien:

In a new working paper, he sent out 4800 fictitious resumes to 600 job openings, with 3600 of them for fake unemployed people. Among those 3600, he varied how long they'd been out of work, how often they'd switched jobs, and whether they had any industry experience. Everything else was kept constant. The mocked-up resumes were all male, all had randomly-selected (and racially ambiguous) names, and all had similar education backgrounds. The question was which of them would get callbacks.

The results were unequivocal, and, to O'Brien's mind "terrifying": "Employers prefer applicants who haven't been out of work for very long, applicants who have industry experience, and applicants who haven't moved between jobs that much. But how long you've been out of work trumps those other factors."

So it's not particularly surprising that President Barack Obama made mention of this problem in his State of the Union address:

I've been asking CEOs to give more long-term unemployed workers a fair shot at that new job and new chance to support their families; this week, many will come to the White House to make that commitment

real. Tonight, I ask every business leader in America to join us and to do the same -- because we are stronger when America fields a full team.

This is a testament to two things -- the significance of the problem and the limitations on what presidential power can do to alleviate it. In this case, Obama can only ask those with the power to alter this dynamic for assistance.

Largely, this weeding out of the long-term unemployed is occurring because of some sort of blanket heuristic being applied to pools of job applicants, in which "long-term unemployed" is getting equated with "weakest candidate." Let's face it: Even when the job market has boomed, an applicant with a long gap in work history would likely draw some scrutiny. But the times have changed, and this methodology was better suited for an environment of full employment, not one in which desperate Americans are looking for any port in a storm.

So let's put some flesh and blood on the people being ground up in the gears of this heuristic. As a benefit to anyone in the position to hire someone who's been out of work for a long time as a result of the recession, here are some things you should know about the people who are asking to be hired:

### **1. They've "played by the rules."**

Terry Harris of Jonesville, S.C., lost her job as an executive assistant at a promotional products company. The company, she said, went belly up.

"My boss actually cried when I was let go," Harris told me during an interview in May 2011. "I have an excellent letter of recommendation from him."

In other words, Harris said, "It was purely an economic thing." She lost her job through no fault of her own.

What she hadn't figured out was why she was still unemployed, and why her husband had been bounced from one wretched low-paying job to another. Why, she asked, if they both finished high school, got some post-secondary education, had solid work histories and held off on having kids, was it such a struggle to pay for things like getting the car fixed and visiting the dentist?

"I think the thing that keeps me going is knowing that we are really lucky, even in spite of the challenges that we are facing," said Harris in an email. "I can't help but feel badly for those that I know are worse off than we are. And I am truly grateful. And knowing that we are not alone helps a great deal, too. But it seems to be getting harder. Harder not to worry, not to cry, not to give up hope. We did everything right, I thought."

### **2. They believed a lifetime of hard work would provide some protection.**

Linda Hall of Spokane, Wash., has worked hard all her life, but hasn't earned respect from the labor market. Laid off for the first time at age 62, Hall has no health insurance, not enough savings for retirement and almost no chance of getting hired again.

"A year ago, I was absolutely certain that I had job security," Hall said. "Change is a part of life. But, truthfully, until a few weeks before [getting laid off], I just didn't see it coming and couldn't imagine such a thing happening."

### **3. They keep "playing by the rules" when they lose a job, only to find it going nowhere.**

[Ted] Casper, then in his late 50s, followed a familiar route for unemployed blue-collar workers. He returned to school, enrolling at Blackhawk Technical College in Janesville, Wis.

Two years later, he had an associate degree in industrial engineering technology. But he was 60, and competition was fierce -- and younger -- with thousands of unemployed factory workers in the area, many from a recently shuttered General Motors plant.

"I got zero responses," says Casper, of Edgerton, Wis. "I literally didn't even get the form letter that goes along with the 'thank you but no thanks.'"

So last summer, Casper returned to Blackhawk to study business management.

"I kind of accepted the fact there's no employer out there that will hire me," he says wearily. He'd like to start a business -- making furniture is a possibility.

### **4. They're diligent job-seekers who have already made hundreds of attempts to find work.**

Patty DiMucci of Cary, N.C., told HuffPost this week she's been out of work since losing her job as a director of event planning for a beauty products retailer in March 2009. She said her unemployment benefits will run out this month.

"This is the first time in my career I'm struggling to find a job," said DiMucci, 42. "I've applied for hundreds of jobs. The rejection takes its toll on you -- that is, when you even get a response from a company."

### **5. They are people who never imagined having to explain this sort of hardship to the children in their once happy household.**

At first, little Emmalee didn't understand what it meant that her dad had lost his job. "She thought maybe I'd misplaced it," he said. But eventually, as her father's jobless spell dragged through spring and into a summer, during which they couldn't afford to fix their broken air conditioning system, Emmalee began to grasp the meaning of unemployment. After Halloween, as the holiday season approached, she asked her father what it would mean for her.

"She looked up at me and said, 'Daddy, are we still going to have Christmas this year?' Talk about taking your heart out and stomping on it."

### **6. They've allowed themselves to become convinced they're "moochers" and "burdens."**

[Mike Schillim] said he lives in a cramped house with his wife and three grown sons, who've been able to find some part-time work. If Schillim's benefits run out before he finds a job, he said he might apply for food stamps.

"I didn't apply for them yet because I got boys that's working and because I don't feel it's right," he said. "I don't want to be accused of being a taker."

Not that he feels like much of a maker. "I feel like I'm a hindrance to society," he said. "I'm disposable."

**7. They are people who fear even the most quotidian of inconveniences. For the long-term unemployed, merely getting a flat tire could be a disaster.**

Tatia Pritchett's 2002 Hyundai Sonata blew a tire early on a Friday morning in June when she was on her way to work.

"I was driving and all of a sudden, KAPOW," she said.

She pulled over and started trying to change the tire, but after removing the first lug nut she couldn't budge the rest. Her mobile phone getting no reception, morning dissolved into afternoon as she waited for help and wondered.

[...]

Pritchett's job is in Baltimore, more than 60 miles from her house, and the trip can take two hours in the D.C. area's awful rush hour traffic. The job pays \$14.44 an hour. Subtract the cost of commuting, she's left with near-poverty wages. But she never seriously considered quitting because unemployment would be worse.

**8. They have an easier time coping with the death of a spouse than they do being out of work.**

People who have been out of work a long time tend to be unhappier, on the whole, than people who have suffered many other types of negative life events, researchers have found. Even if you've lost your spouse to death or divorce, you have a better chance of climbing back up to your previous level of happiness.

That seems to be because people invest a huge amount of their identities in their professional lives -- and it's hard to make the adjustment when those lives get put on hold.

**9. They have come perilously close to dying.**

[Lianne Valenti] spent the holidays with her sister in Utah, trying to put the pain out of her mind, hoping an herbal remedy she'd ordered online would fix her up when it finally arrived. Still, the feeling was hard to ignore when it radiated up from her diaphragm and across her shoulder. "A lot of times it would wake me up in the middle of the night," she said. "I spent so much time sweating, thinking it was just pain, I just need to breathe. And when it passed, it would pass immediately."

Back home one night in early January, it didn't pass as quickly as usual. "I was sitting here in my chair and it lasted for two hours. It was all I could do to breathe. I couldn't open my eyes."

A little after 5 a.m., Valenti called her sister in nearby Lakewood and asked for a ride to the emergency room. Once there, she described her symptoms to a doctor and said she thought she was having a gallstone attack. The doctor checked her out with an electrocardiogram and told her she'd suffered a heart attack.

**10. They have contemplated, and sometimes even attempted, their own suicide.**

Kerri, a 57-year-old living near Seattle, says she lost her software sales job three years ago -- and that age discrimination has made her ongoing search for work feel hopeless at times.

"I went to an interview and the guy actually excused me before we even started. He said, 'Well, we're looking at your resume and we don't feel that you'd be a good fit,'" Kerri recalls. "Why would I be brought in after two phone interviews with managers?"

By the winter of 2009, she says, she'd taken all the rejection she could stand. She swallowed a bunch of pills.

"There was a reason: I had no hope," she recalls. "There was no point for the future. I had just lost another job opportunity that I thought I had done a really good job at and they just dismissed me. I was old, and they're not going to hire me. With that, I couldn't have my life back."

These are the people who would like to come work for you.

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