



A ROAD MAP FOR GRADUATES AND PRECARIOUS WORKERS

HOW TO FIND **WORK** IN THE GIG ECONOMY

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2019 EDITION

PREFACE

“We’re a society that knows how to apply for a job. The challenge for employment seekers today is to become proficient at finding work. That’s a much more complicated process than applying for a job.”

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These are challenging and confusing times for graduates trying to find meaningful employment in today’s workplace and their parents. The same goes for experienced people who are losing what they thought were steady jobs and trying to find new jobs in a workplace they don’t recognize.

For those who still have steady jobs and all the traditional benefits that are included with them, today’s workplace looks and feels like it did to previous generations.

They may be nervous as they look at what is going on around them, but for now, they feel secure. They know that their world is shrinking and that the non-traditional job world is expanding. Trying to make sense of what is going on is very challenging, even for those who have been studying the workplace for years.

The intent of this book is to help people to begin to understand what is going on in the workplace and to give them the tools and strategies they need to succeed in it.

The place to start is to understand that the workplace is going through the biggest transition to occur in the past 200 years. We haven’t seen anything like it since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution when our ancestors began to make a living from something called a “job.” We don’t understand how the job has evolved to the point where it has become an integral part of our lives and the economic foundation we depend on to live in our society. Our job, in many respects, has become our identity.

In his bestselling book *“Transitions”*, William Bridges identified what he called three overlapping stages and very disturbing experiences that occur during a transition.

1. An *“ending”*, where we break from our old identity and try to create a new one. We resist saying good-bye to our old identity and the feeling of competence it gave us.
2. A *“neutral zone”* where we’re caught in a chaotic and confusing place where everything is up for grabs and no one knows what the rules are.
3. A new *“beginning”* where we feel at home and productive in the way things are with a new identity based on the new conditions. However, most of us resist taking the risk of trying something completely unfamiliar and staking so much on an untried way of being and doing.

As a society, most of us are either in stage 1 or 2 and while some have moved successfully to stage 3, it will probably take several generations for most of us to get there, just as it did for our ancestors 200 years ago.

Our ancestors must be having a good laugh as they watch us struggle to wean ourselves off the traditional, twentieth century job. If you look at your family tree,

you're likely to see that you're descended from self-employed people who earned their living as contractors, trades people, craftspeople, and small business owners. When the concept of working for someone else full-time became widespread with industrialization, many of our forefathers thought it was a crazy idea. It was seen as unpleasant, unnatural, and an inhuman way to work. It's the ultimate irony. The job, that thing that our ancestors saw as abhorrent, is the thing to which we've become addicted.

A New Era

Like it or not, employment seekers need to face the reality of today's workplace and be willing to accept temporary or contract work without reservations. They also need to accept the fact that there's no guarantee that anyone will offer them employment. They may need to create their own employment. That doesn't mean they have to give up looking for a job, if that's what they want; it means recognizing how the workplace has changed and understanding that the path to a traditional job today is often via the temporary or contract work route.

There is work available, but a lot of it is not packaged in the form of a job, as we traditionally understand that term. So it makes more sense to look for work as opposed to looking for a job. But that is a huge psychological shift for people to make in their approach to finding employment considering how entrenched the full-time-job model continues to be in our society. It's also a new role for most people, and our education, training, and in some cases our upbringing does not prepare us well for it.

Today's employment seeker must be more entrepreneurial and enterprising in his or her search for work than previous generations, and needs to be better at selling themselves. Acquiring self-marketing skills is a must, as is the ability to find hidden employment opportunities, since at least 80 percent of these today are never advertised. Finally, employment seekers need to learn how to approach employers in a strategically effective way rather than the reactive, mostly passive approach used by people in the twentieth century. And they must understand the role social media plays in finding employment today and how to use it effectively.

Those who are unable or unwilling to adapt to this reality will find themselves competing for a dwindling number of conventional, full-time jobs. Those who aren't afraid of a freelance career, who can adapt their job-search strategies and market themselves effectively will have more options, offer more value to employers, and best position themselves for twenty-first century success.

Misleading Unemployment Statistics

The official unemployment statistics published by governments in Western countries are a sham. They don't come close to measuring the true state of unemployment. This is a huge problem. These statistics are among the most closely watched statistics produced by governments and are the basis for many policies relating to what unemployed people are entitled to in the way of unemployment

benefits and their eligibility for programs designed to help the unemployed find work.

In Canada, according to a November 15, 2011 article in the *Globe and Mail*, employment insurance is at the heart of Canada's social safety net, yet it may be one of the most unjust and economically inefficient government programs. At the time of the article, less than half of jobless Canadians received unemployment benefits, down from about 80 percent in the mid-1990s, when the Canadian government made the program less generous to save money. The program, like its' counterparts in other Western countries, was built for the 1970's, when workers spent most of their careers with one employer.

In the U.S., in December 2014, only 23.1% of unemployed Americans received unemployment benefits from state programs – an all-time low, according to the Economic Policy Institute Briefing Paper #392, March 2015. And for the first time in modern history, underemployment may be as big a problem as unemployment. An October 11, 2012 article in *Bloomberg Businessweek* pointed out that numerous economic studies have shown that the longer a person is unemployed, the harder it becomes for him to ever find work. Unemployment is a setback; long-term unemployment is a sentence. Many companies are reluctant to hire those who haven't worked in a long time, figuring they're damaged goods.

Kidding ourselves that the unemployment situation is better than it actually is, is the worst position we could take in dealing effectively with the challenges in today's workplace. Unfortunately, that is exactly what we are doing.

Challenges for Educators

The fundamental challenge for colleges and universities is that for generations they have been turning out employees, i.e. graduates who invariably found a job. Now, increasingly, they will need to turn out entrepreneurs, or students who have an enterprising approach to finding work. This doesn't mean students have to start a business when they graduate, though those who want to do this should be encouraged and given as much help as possible to succeed. It does mean that graduates must have an entrepreneurial mentality in terms of marketing themselves and meeting the needs of employers.

We tend to equate anything related to entrepreneurship to be the domain of business/commerce and MBA students. We need to change that thinking and recognize that this also applies to graduates in the liberal arts, social sciences, and every other sector in post-secondary education. Like all other employment seekers, today's graduates must acquire self-marketing skills and be right on top of what is happening in the sectors they want to work in. The key question is, who is going to teach them these skills?

The biggest weakness in the post-secondary education sector in all countries is the lack of experience in today's workplace by those who are responsible for education policy, funding, administration, and delivery. How do these people who live in the land of the steady paycheck and traditional benefits relate to the challenges graduates face who will make their living from contract, temporary, and part-time employment with few, if any benefits, including a pension?

There's a huge disconnect between these bureaucrats, administrators and educators and their students in terms of their own work environment and the workplace their students are entering. And that disconnect will exist into the foreseeable future. Going forward, we must find ways to educate those already in the education system about the challenges of earning a living in today's workplace and hire people at all levels that have this type of experience. Only then can we realistically align the educational system with the needs of today's graduates.

CAREER COUNSELING

The area of career counseling needs a major overhaul and more resources need to be allocated to it. This area has never been a high priority within the education system and that has to change. In a New York Times article on September 13, 2013, Wake Forest University president Nathan Hatch said "For years, most liberal-arts schools seemed to put career-services offices somewhere just below parking as a matter of administration priority." Sadly, that still applies within the education sector. President Hatch has given the area of career services top priority and is giving it the funding and resources it needs to succeed, a rarity in today's education sector.

While there are a few examples of innovative thinking in this area, in the main, most colleges and universities are doing a poor job of preparing their students for today's workplace. And some of the career counselors who do recognize the need to update and improve the services they offer to their students are not getting the resources they need or the support of senior administrators.

A study in 2017 of 67 Canadian post-secondary institutions by PSE Information Systems, rated them on the quality of the careers services they provide. About 10 percent were rated as "Impressive", 35 percent "above average" and the remaining 55 percent below these categories.

Effective career counseling must be a part of the curriculum, not an option, as it currently is. Before they graduate, all students must be required to take workshops and courses provided by the career counseling department that educate them about today's workplace and shows them how to succeed in it. We also need people in these departments who are entrepreneurial, have operated their own businesses, and who can adequately prepare students who want to pursue that option.

Canadore College, in Ontario, Canada has recently decided to offer "Job Counseling for Life" to its' graduates. That's a forward-thinking initiative that all colleges and universities should consider offering.

Another useful tool for graduates and employers is the CCR, or "co-curricular record", which is a second transcript that graduates receive, which highlights their leadership and other skills they've developed in volunteer activities on and off campus. This is a very useful tool for employers to get a broader understanding of who graduates are and what they've achieved outside the classroom. The CCR is being used by about 50 universities in Canada.

An August 20, 2012, article in *Bloomberg Businessweek*, covered a significant development in the area of helping graduates to find meaningful work. Six US undergraduate business schools require students to attend classes that prepare them for the process of finding work, some of them starting in their freshman year. Most

significantly, these activities are embedded in the curriculum and students must complete them, just like all their other classes, before they can graduate. Sending our graduates out into the workplace as unprepared as they are currently is inexcusable. If all colleges and universities followed the example of these six business schools, the level of graduate unemployment and underemployment would decrease and the quality of employment they're finding would increase.

Challenges for Parents

Given how different today's workplace is and the fact that you may have no experience in it, how do advise your offspring to succeed in it? For starters, as pointed out earlier, don't feel bad about not understanding what is going on; even the experts are often baffled by it.

A fundamental fact that previous generations don't understand, or are sometimes reluctant to acknowledge is that finding meaningful employment was so much easier in the past than it is today. If you needed to find employment today and used the same approach you used back in the day, you'd be in trouble. In an October 27, 2012 article in the *Globe and Mail*, Judith Maxwell, past chair of the Economic Council of Canada said, "People over their forties in Canada have no idea what it's like for a young person trying to find a pathway to adulthood right now." That would apply to other Western countries too.

The vast majority of employment seekers, be they graduates or experienced people who are losing their jobs, have no idea about how to find work. Like most of society, they're stuck in the twentieth century and focus, almost exclusively, on finding a traditional job.

Another fundamental fact of life for today's employment seeker is that if an employer is interested in them, one of the first things they'll do is to check them out on the Internet, or social media sites to see what they can find out about them. Most employers and recruiters do this and they say that almost forty percent of the applicants they check out are rejected because of offensive comments or inappropriate material they find.

So before your offspring begin their search for employment, here's a question they need to answer and think about: "What would a search of the Internet or social media reveal about me?"

There's a whole chapter "Guidelines for Post-secondary Students" included in the book that will raise their awareness of what is going on in the workplace and gives them tools and strategies, specifically designed for them to succeed in it.

In a December 26, 2012, article in the *Globe and Mail*, A Canadian graduate summed up nicely the challenges facing his generation: "You have to be incredibly comfortable with ambiguity. You have to be incredibly resourceful and you have to learn a bunch of skills that school didn't provide you with." Many graduates around the world will agree with those comments.

Since there is a wide range of effectiveness in how colleges and universities are preparing their graduates to succeed in today's workplace, you need to make this one of the criteria you use to evaluate any college or university your offspring are considering applying to. Learn as much as you can about how they're doing in this

area. That said, beware of generalized statements like this that you may find on their websites: “Within six months of graduation, ninety percent of our graduates have found employment.” The key question is: “What kind of employment did they find.”

In This Edition

Throughout this edition you will find updated commentary and insights on key happenings in today’s workplace and where informed professionals are suggesting it is headed. College/university students, graduates and experienced people who have lost their jobs don’t have the luxury of waiting for governments or the education sector to catch up with the needs of employment seekers in the twenty-first century. They need to take ownership of this issue themselves as do people who are underemployed or who want to prepare themselves for the possibility of losing their jobs.

Thousands of university/college students and experienced people in North America, the UK, Ireland, and other English-speaking countries have already benefited from the earlier editions of the book and it is in use at hundreds of colleges and universities worldwide. First published in 2000, it has received favorable reviews by Career Counseling groups in Canada, the US and the UK.

It provides a blueprint for finding employment opportunities in a strategically effective way. This book doesn’t provide any easy answers. There are none. But for those who are prepared to do all the work required in this book and who are also prepared to move out of their comfort zone and take some chances, the payoff will be that they will be miles ahead of the average employment seeker. And they will be on a solid foundation to succeed regardless of the upcoming challenges in the workplace.

This edition contains extensive updates, changes and a significant reorganization of the previous editions. Three new chapters have been added: Why Would Employers Be Interested In You? Guidelines For Downsized Executives and Graduates Unite!

INTRODUCTION

In the Preface, Judith Maxwell, past chair of the Economic Council of Canada was quoted as saying “People over their forties in Canada have no idea what it’s like for

a young person trying to find a pathway to adulthood right now.”

So here’s a question: What percentage of the senior bureaucrats in our governments

who are in charge of the Departments or Ministries of Labor, Employment, etc, and

the senior administrators in charge of our colleges and universities, would you say

are “over their forties”? How about one hundred percent, or close to it?

Further, they probably have no experience in today’s workplace, may never have missed a paycheck in their lives and are safely ensconced in their steady jobs with

all the traditional benefits that go with it. So, here’s another question: Does it make

sense for people of this ilk to be the ones who are in charge of these departments/ministries and educational institutions? Or, has the time come for us to

have a serious discussion about how to significantly overhaul these places to meet

the needs of the unemployed and graduates in the twenty-first century? Coming up

with a sensible answer to this complex question is beyond the scope of this book, but

let’s at least begin the discussion.

A Two-Tiered Society

In many respects, we’re now a two-tiered society: those who have a traditional job

and all the benefits that go with it, and those who are earning a living in nontraditional

ways in what is being called the Gig Economy.

This has been going on for about forty years and while there has been regular commentary in the media about the challenges of today’s graduates and downsized

workers trying to find decent jobs, our governments need to do more to help these groups.

In July 2017, a report commissioned by the U.K. Government, called the “Taylor Review” was released. It was a review of employment practices with a mandate to “make sure that people working in the Gig Economy are properly protected”. This kind of review of the challenges of workers earning a living outside the traditional job is long overdue and should be undertaken by all governments.

It should include a review of our taxation, unemployment benefits, pensions, and health coverage systems to see if Gig Economy workers are being treated fairly

and

what changes need to be made to meet their needs.

How This Book Is Organized

To show you how to cope with all the changes taking place in the workplace, and how to succeed in it, the book has been broken down into the following sections:

Chapter 1: How the Workplace Has Changed

To be successful in today's workplace, you need to understand how significantly it

has changed compared to the workplace where your parents and grandparents earned their living. Many employment seekers don't understand this and their approach to finding employment is fundamentally the same as previous generations.

And it doesn't work.

Today's employment seekers need a whole new set of tools and strategies that previous generations never used and they're not going to learn about them as part

of their college or university experience. And downsized, experienced workers who

are losing jobs they've had for years, will not be familiar with these tools and strategies and will be using them for the first time.

Finally, today's employment seeker will have to learn how to earn a living in the Gig

Economy, a huge challenge since most of them come from families who have earned

their living from traditional jobs for generations.

Chapter 2: Why Would Employers Be Interested In You?

Knowing yourself and what you have to offer potential employers takes on a whole

new dimension in today's workplace. It's no longer enough to identify yourself as an

accountant, graphic designer, librarian, or whatever; you have to identify the specific skills that you have to offer and how those benefit the employer you want to

work with.

Unlike previous generations, it's unlikely that you'll be applying to the HR department of a medium to large company, you're more likely to be applying to the

owner of a small company that doesn't have an HR department. Hiring will be one of the many hats they wear, so your approach to them will have to be much more strategic and focused on their needs, not yours.

Before you apply to any employer, you need to take the time to analyze and identify

the things that are important to you in your life and in your career. This isn't easy and it may be uncomfortable for you, but it's the foundation on which every other aspect of being successful in today's workplace is built.

Many of today's employment seekers have never done this and they rush

aimlessly

from one job application to the next without ever considering if the company is one

that they would enjoy working with and one that shares their values and beliefs.

Chapter 3: How to Market and Sell Yourself

This is the Achilles' heel for most of today's employment seekers. They don't like it.

They don't understand what it is about. They may think the very idea of doing it is beneath them and have very negative views about those who do it. But make no mistake. While your parents and grandparents generation could get by without knowing how to do this, you can't.

The good news is anyone can learn how to do it; it's mostly common sense. And it's

not about becoming something that you're not, that would be a big mistake. The key

is to shed your misconceptions of what the process is about.

You know more about marketing and selling than you think you do and you're going to be pleasantly surprised at how effective you can be at it once you understand how the process works.

Chapter 4: How To Find Hidden Employment Opportunities

For previous generations, finding a job was a pretty straightforward process. You picked up a copy of the major newspaper in your area that had a large section full of job ads. Those sections have all but disappeared. You may also have registered

with an Employment Agency.

Employers today use a variety of different methods to get the word out that they're

hiring. The Internet and Social Media sites play a key role and knowing how to use

them effectively is a must.

You also have to be right on top of what is happening in the field you want to work

in by being connected to all of the news sources related to it. And you have to be an

active, and effective networker.

Finally, the whole hiring process is being turned on its' head. Instead of the traditional approach of getting the word out somehow that they're hiring and then waiting for applications, employers are moving toward finding potential hires via the Internet and Social Media sites.

So, yet another necessary skill for today's employment seeker is to know how this

process works, how employers in your field are doing it, and how to increase your

chances of being found.

Chapter 5: Guidelines for Post-secondary Students

While all of the foregoing chapters are essential reading for students, this section

will focus on their specific needs. Sample marketing tools and strategies designed for

students are included along with these sections:

Common mistakes made by students.

Essential skills students need today.

You and the Internet.

Creating a financial plan.

An action plan.

Chapter 6: Guidelines for Downsized Executives

Losing what you thought was a secure job is a traumatic experience that only people

who have experienced it, including the author who has been through it several times, can understand. Coping with the experience, without help, is very difficult and this chapter will offer support and guidelines to get through it.

Included are marketing tools and strategies specifically designed for downsized executives, along with commentary on how to survive and succeed in a workplace

that is very different from the one they entered when they graduated.

Also included is a section called: “Losing Our Jobs Made Us Happier” that profiles

experienced people who lost their jobs and who subsequently realized that the experience was a blessing in disguise.

Chapter 7: Precarious Workers: Create Your Own Job

For today’s employment seeker, creating their own job is mostly about changing their perception of themselves as employees and seeing themselves as independent

contractors willing to work on projects that aren’t long-term and probably don’t include benefits that traditionally come with a job. Most employment opportunities

today are to be found in small businesses. If the only option you give them is to offer

you a job, you’re making it hard for them to hire you. There may be employers out there who could benefit from hiring you as a contractor but who don’t know it. It’s up to you to educate them.

Also, being a contractor may be the best way to get a job. Some employers who take

on contractors with no intention of offering them a job, end up doing just that. If they’re doing good work and fit in well with the organization, they realize it’s in their own best interest to keep them by offering them a job.

Starting your own small business is also an option and there are many more resources and support groups available today to help you to do that. Finally, many

of today’s Millennials are saying they’re not interested in a traditional job. They want the flexibility and independence that comes from being a contractor.

Chapter 8: Managing Your Career

This is one of the things that traditionally have come with having a job that many

employees take for granted. If you've been with the same employer for years, you may never have given it a thought. That's a luxury you can't afford today. A major challenge for people who lose what they thought was a steady job is the realization

that along with losing a steady paycheck is also the loss of benefits that came with

the job. Now, they have to pay for coverage for things like health care, unemployment benefits, life insurance, long-term disability insurance, dental care for them and their families, a pension plan, and other benefits they've taken for granted for years. So, if you currently have a steady job and have never given any thought to how you would pay for these benefits on your own, now would be a good

time to do that.

And part of the challenge of working in the Gig Economy is the need to keep your skills up to date and relevant in a constantly changing workplace. So you need to be

aware of the changes going on in the workplace and in particular, the sector you work in. And while you're busy with the current project you're working on, you have to be actively involved in finding and developing new projects.

Chapter 9: Getting Started, An Implementation Plan

Finally, having done all the work required up to this point, you're ready to find meaningful work. That requires a strategic and focused approach. This section will

provide a plan to do that, and reduce the frustration that comes from an unfocused approach.

Chapter 10: Graduates Unite!

Apart from unemployment among graduates is the problem of underemployment. Many graduates, after having tried to find a decent job without success, settle for this believing there is no other option available to them. They feel isolated and on their own. It doesn't have to be that way.

A much more effective approach is to be in regular contact with a group of your peers who are serious about finding meaningful work, and who will help and support one another until everyone has found a job or meaningful work. The advantages of this are:

It will speed up your search for work versus doing this on your own.

It will increase your self-confidence and decrease the feeling of being isolated.

It gives you an opportunity to share tips on employment opportunities and useful resources.

You can get feedback on the effectiveness of the tools and strategies you're working

on to find meaningful work.

It's a good way to develop networking skills.

This section will suggest ways to accomplish this and the author will be available as

a resource to work with any individual or group if they feel they need help to form

and develop their network.