

What a nice career I had. I had spent 20 years in my industry and then one day was called in unexpectedly to be told I would be terminated for some vague and unconvincing reasons. The year was 2004 and at age 44, it was my first time being let go. It hit me hard and I had no idea what the future would hold. However, what seemed like forever, took me about 6 months to re-enter the job market. I now held the same managerial position I was previously in, but about \$18,000 lower in salary and instead of a 25 minute drive to Hauppauge, I now had to commute to Connecticut. Through it all, I felt lucky and blessed to get another chance. Over time, I loved my new job and thought this was indeed my new home, despite the commute.

Then in August 2010, I was told my company was involved in a merger. My position was being taken over by the new company's manager and my job over the next five months was to train him. I left in February 2011 and for the next year could not find work. This second time around was much more difficult as the economy had a choke hold on hiring and I was not getting any younger. As I turned 52, I took a non managerial freelance job that paid well but the hours were tough. They included overnights and weekends and the same long CT commute but I had no choice but to persevere.

After a year, my body could no longer handle the strain of this lifestyle and I became ill. I went on medical leave and after quadruple bypass surgery and recovery, I called my job to find out it was no longer there. I had been replaced and I guess it was a blessing in disguise though that put me back on the unemployment line for the third time.

I came to Hempstead Works, which was mandated by the Dept of Labor to attend. I thought I would get the usual "song and dance" and then could get on my way but these people truly wanted to help me. We brainstormed about the options that were available for me. One idea was taking advantage of a NYS grant to attend Stony Brook University at no cost to take a Project Management Certification class. After a bit of procrastinating, I accepted and it was a great experience. I was with other talented people from all walks of life who were going through the same frustration I was. We made our class seem like we were at work. We learned so much, we studied, did projects together and were all pulling for each other to find employment. It prepared me for what happened next.

On a snowy December morning, I am driving where else, Connecticut for an interview. I had gotten a lead through someone in my network. We all know how essential networking is for getting a job. There's a saying.... if you're not networking, you're **not**working. Only the "e" and "o" are different in these words. Pretty weird, huh?

Anyway, at age 53, after 10 months of sitting home, I was hired as Director of Operations for a major company. It's the best paying job I have ever had in my whole career. This after, looking around for months for anything that would just pay some bills. I couldn't even get hired for entry level positions since my resume was full of experience. Here I am now, in a senior management position, wondering how did I get here?

Don't give up. Keep your smile and stay positive. It is absolutely tough to do but you need to bring a positive energy to everyone you meet. Though you are not working, you can still be the best husband or wife, son or daughter, etc ... That is still in your control. Yes, a little luck never hurts in your search too.

Christmas came early for me and my family. I am grateful for all those who helped me or just offered me a word of encouragement. I thank the people at Hempstead Works for opening up doors of opportunity though it is up to you to make good choices and follow them through 100%.

The best to all of you.

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