

FIRED, TERMINATED, TRANSFERRED, SACKED,
UNEMPLOYED, UNDEREMPLOYED, LAID OFF,
ACQUIRED, GIVEN THE BOOT, CUT, SHOWN
THE DOOR, REORGANIZED, COST REDUCED,

BANKRUPTED, **OUTPLACE:** FIRED FOR
CAUSE, OFFICE POLITICS, POOR PERFORMANCE,

**(CAREER CHANGE, REAL WORLD STORIES,
REAL WORLD ANSWERS)** DISCRIMINATION,

UNEMPLOYMENT, NOT FAIR, ANGER, FIRED,
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PERFORMANCE, DISCRIMINATION, SACKED,

UNEMPLOYMENT, NOT FAIR, ANGER, FIRED,

TERMINATED, TRANSFERRED, UNEMPLOYED,

BY: DENNIS SMITH LAID OFF, ANGER,

REORGANIZED, COST REDUCED, OUTPLACED

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

My primary goal in writing this book is to serve, and possibly educate those who are going through any type of career transition. The majority of us will suffer through several transitions during our career. I have been blessed with friends, family, and industry professionals that have encouraged and participated in this endeavor.

I would especially thank my wife, Jean, for her encouraging words and suggestions. I am also very appreciative of the patience and guidance shown by my editor, Gretchen Bacon. Her experienced review, guidance, and publishing industry knowledge truly enabled the creation of Outplace.

I am very thankful for the review and suggestions offered by my human resource industry friends, Rob Skacel, Laura Schanz, Barry Davis, Kimberly Blessing, Steve Muller and Paul Jaspers. Their critical review and suggestions confirmed the technical validity of Outplace.

My greatest debt is my knowledge gained from the thousands of individuals that have attended support and network meetings at C3N, (Christ Centered Career Network). A truly special Thank You to the staff at LCBC Church, and the C3N leadership team, that makes this ministry possible.

Testimonials & Comments:

“Outplace is a great resource for keeping the proper perspective in the midst of difficult times. Dennis offers both a healthy outlook and practical advice for anyone facing job transition.”

Rob Skacel, PhD
Business Psychologist
True Edge Performance Solutions

“The advice offered in Outplace is sound and based on solid experience and principles and will undoubtedly provide insights and hope”

Laura Schanz
Senior Consultant and President
Laura Schanz Consulting Associates

“Really liked the format, conversational tone and the content. The “Rest of the Story” and the ASAP program were very good.”

Barry Davis, MS, CTC, MCDP
Senior Consultant/Head of Career Services
Lancaster Management Associates Consulting Group

“I really liked the Client Updates – The Rest of the Story”

Kimberly Blessing
Director of Career Services
York Technical Institute

“You have hit it out of the park, and knocked the cover off the ball with your content. I love the story as you tell us about your weekly activity in a practical way---.”

Steve Muller
President & Owner
Muller Consulting

About the Author

Dennis Smith holds a Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration from Dakota Wesleyan University and an MBA from the University of St. Thomas. He has worked in the field of finance, accounting, and management for more than forty years. His experience includes domestic and international operating financial management in the computer and automotive industries, corporate strategic planning and mergers responsibilities at a Fortune 500 corporate office, and senior financial positions in the high-end domestic custom cabinetry industry. As Dennis would say, he has seen his fair share of employees being purchased, reorganized, transferred, merged, laid-off, and outplaced by the best of them.

Dennis has served as an adjunct professor for the University of St. Thomas and Lebanon Valley College, teaching graduate level courses in international business and finance. His teaching style emphasizes application of theory.

Throughout his years in business, Dennis has interfaced with outplacement firms and individual counselors during many of mergers and acquisitions. In 2005, he founded a career ministry that has hosted thousands of individual employers and career explorers at its weekly meetings. The ASAP program was originally developed for this career ministry. Dennis has also served for many years on the Elder Board of his church, LCBC in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, one of the 100

largest and fastest growing churches in the nation. To find more information about the programs online, go to www.outplace.info.

Dennis has been married to his wonderful wife, Jean, for over 40 years. They have three married children and, currently, three grandchildren. Dennis and Jean live and work in central Pennsylvania.

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Dennis Smith

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INTRODUCTION

After many years of teaching material to students and individuals coping with outplacement, I found that my “students” often felt the material was boring and difficult to understand, and I felt I needed a way to teach the important principles of a job search in an entertaining way. This book resulted from meeting that need.

My primary goal in writing this book is to help, serve, and possibly educate those who are going through any type of career transition. The majority of us will suffer through several transitions during our career. Looking back on my forty-plus year career and my own personal experiences of being hired, fired, outplaced, transferred, purchased, sold, reorganized, laid off, and anything else you wish to call it, I’ve found many experiences and stories that are interesting as well as educational. My years of leading a career ministry at LCBC have reinforced my belief that many individuals are very capable at what they do but are totally lost and fearful in a career transition. Hopefully, this book will share, in the form of a fable, suggestions on how to manage and understand a career transition.

The individual stories in this book are pure fiction; however, many of them are loosely based on real individuals’ life experiences. Of prime importance is the point that **being unemployed is not the end of the world**. Instead, it’s a stepping-stone to a new adventure.

I have personally experienced, and many times witnessed, the power that a strong personal Christian belief has on career transition. The people who have it seem to weather the storm of unemployment with a great positive attitude. They understand that transition comes into their lives for a purpose: it is not something to be feared. They take the opportunity to strengthen their relationships with their spouse, children, and families. They build their networks. They relax. They are rested. They interview well. They are on top of their game. They make the right choices!

I truly believe the Lord has a great plan for each of us, and that plan is dependent upon our making the right choices. When we make the wrong choices, the Lord does not give up on us. He modifies his plan and patiently waits for us to make the right choices. It is my hope that this book will help guide you to the right choices.

—Dennis Smith

“For I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD. They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.” Jeremiah 29:11

BARLEY, THOMAS, AND SUMMIT

Welcome! I am truly grateful you have decided to spend the week with Will Barley and the Barley, Thomas, and Summit staff. We are one of the best Outplacement and Recruiting firms in the area. Your decision to spend time with Will and learn from his insights and clients, is a true demonstration of your commitment to finding a new job, and a successful career transition. Will is one of the best and has many years of experience and training reflected in the thousands of successful job transitions experienced by our clients. Our time is short, let's meet the staff before you join Will:

STAFF

WILL BARLEY – CO-OWNER, FOCUSES ON OPERATIONS AND COUNSELING. Will has a Masters in Psychology and Counseling from the local University. He has a middle-class background with parents who were accountants. He is in his mid-40s, has a wife and three children, and is active in his church.

JACK THOMAS – CO-OWNER, FOCUSES ON SALES OF THE FIRM'S SERVICES. Jack has a BA in Communications from an Ivy League school. He

comes from a wealthy family. Jack was divorced twice and is currently not attached. He has no children and is in his late 30s.

NATHAN “NATE” SUMMIT – FOUNDER. Nate sold the business to Jack and Will several years ago and functions as their advisor. He is older than Jack and Will and very smart. Nate helps with the really hard cases and knows everyone in town. His fondness for Scotch whiskey and cigars is well known.

SHIRLEY TAGSTROM and MARTHA KLING – OFFICE SUPPORT AND RECEPTION. These two young, computer-savvy women share the office support and receptionist duties. Both are in their 30s and married. Shirley has one child; Martha has none. While Shirley is better with computer issues, Martha is more sociable and has a knack for putting people at ease. Both assist clients with research as well.

MARK MALONE – COMMUNICATIONS AND WRITING CONSULTANT. Mark works with clients to prepare resumes, write cover letters, and teach interview preparation. He has a Bachelors degree in English and Communications. With 25 years of HR experience, Mark knows many of the HR people in town and has made introductions for Jack. Mark is married with grown children and has a

wife who is a state senator. The firm receives some outplacement contracts from the state, thanks to Mark's wife.

MELISSA LEONG – OFFICE MANAGER. The go-to person in the firm, Melissa does everything from payroll to bills to supplies and she functions as the private secretary for Will and Jack. Melissa has 30 years of experience, primarily in the local school administration. She is extremely organized and is very active in the same church as Will attends.

JENNIFER MARLEY – RECRUITER. In addition to outplacement counseling, the firm also fills search contracts for many small companies without professional HR staffs. Often loud and gregarious, Jennifer is in her early 30s, unmarried, and aggressive. She works with Jack to sell her recruiting services and helps him when he is overloaded with sales. She also manages the firm's website, where clients can post resumes and Jennifer can post open search positions. Jennifer has a background in HR and also did a stint as a realtor.

CHAPTER 1: MONDAY

Monday, 7:30am

Though I'm excited to get to work today, apparently the yellow Ford who just blew through that stop sign is in much more of a hurry than I am. I know someday it will catch up with him, even though I'm left to pull over and clean up the coffee that went from the cup to all over my dashboard, sweater, pants, and even my glasses in a split second. I won't let this incident ruin my good mood, but I may need to stay behind my desk today.

I'm anxious to begin the day because I always look forward to seeing the progress my clients have made during the week. It's really their stories that have such an impact on my life. Though the struggling economy and layoffs are constant news and can be depressing, as an outplacement counselor, I look forward to helping people every day.

The 30-minute commute brings me to the office—Barley, Thomas, and Summit Outplacement and Recruiting Firm—located in an older but very nice and safe downtown shopping area. The front door opens into the reception area. Walking out of the reception area and into the main part of the building, you'll find a small library, 16 fairly large office cubicles, a few small private offices for our outplacement clients and staff, and larger offices for the partners. We also have a larger meeting room, a couple of conference rooms, and a small break room. The

public parking right across the street serves our clients and staff. The space is decorated conservatively, colored in muted tones, and not overly done, giving the office an elegance that is aging well. Nate Summit, Jack Thomas, and I share the three spaces behind the building. A new BMW 5 series, a fairly new Cadillac, and a 7-year-old Avalon are all parked in a row. Guess which one is mine?

My partner, Jack, and I own the firm; we purchased it several years ago from its founder, Nate, who is a short, ruddy, and rather rotund man with thick glasses and perpetually rumpled shirts. The firm is profitable, and we make a good living, but cash flow is still a bit tight because we will make payments to Nate for another couple of years on the purchase of the business. As part of the sales agreement, Jack and I agreed to provide Nate an office and pay him yearly for 200 hours of consulting to the firm. Nate's intelligence and expertise are extremely helpful, especially with the hard cases. Because he has been doing outplacement for over forty years, Nate has also collected a variety of immensely valuable contacts and knows everyone in town. Nate's fondness for Scotch whiskey and cigars is well known, but they are not allowed in the office. (However, he does hide a small bottle in his desk drawer for, as he says, celebration purposes. He thinks I don't know about it.) Nate has done well financially and is enjoying his quasi-retirement years.

Jack and I get along fine, but we are exact opposites. I am fairly conservative, active in my church, family oriented, and somewhat introverted. Physically, I'm on the shorter side, unfortunately starting to see some hair thinning on top, but overall I stay in good shape. I run the office and provide all the recruiting and outplacement services that Jack sells. Jack, on the other hand, has the tall, dark, and handsome mystique, is very outgoing and noisy, and is always ready with a great big smile. He also has a love for custom-made suits, silk ties, and Italian custom shoes—a great contrast to what he calls my “unfortunate love of bow ties.” He has a BA in communications from a fairly well-known Ivy League school and played on the college golf team. Lucky enough to be born into a wealthy family, Jack spends a lot of time at the country club and is still a scratch golfer. Jack is in his late 30s, has been divorced twice, and has no children. I believe he is currently unattached, but you never know with Jack. His natural friendliness makes him an excellent sales person. In short, Jack sells, and I deliver. I like to think we are both very good at what we do.

My wife, Jane, will be upset that the coffee spilled on what used to be her Avalon. I drive it now because she has the newer van and uses it as a school and soccer bus for our two children. We are blessed that our income from the firm has allowed her to be a stay-at-home mom for our kids. She is a CPA and put her career on hold to raise our family. I will always admire her for that decision. It was

a bit of a financial bind at first, but the Lord provided. Jane and I met when I was in graduate school and she was completing her accounting degree.

Monday, 8:00am

Because I park in the back of the building, I have to take the freight elevator up to the office floor. It looks a bit old, but it works fine. Melissa Leong, our office manager, is already sitting at her desk when I arrive. As usual, her hair is pulled back into a perfect bun and her outfit meticulously put together, down to the matching earrings. She functions as our office manager as well as our private secretary. Her head is bent over her work, but she looks up as I walk by her office. “Good morning, Melissa!” I say cheerfully. “Good Monday morning, Will!” she replies, smiling, as she adjusts her glasses to look at me and then returns to her work.

Our doors open officially for clients at 9:00am, but Melissa and I are usually in early and normally the first ones in the office. Melissa has 30 years of experience, primarily in the local school administration offices, and has been with firm for the last five years. She is the go-to, super-organized person in the office. She does everything from helping with clients to payroll and supply ordering. Jack and I trust her completely. She also attends and is active in my church.

I normally book counseling appointments with clients for about an hour, but they can sometimes run longer. The actual face-to-face time runs no more than 45 minutes. I try to see each of our clients once a week, if for no other reason than to assess their job hunt progress. This meeting allows me to get a read on their attitude and morale and make suggestions regarding their need to meet with others on the staff. We also set goals to accomplish and review what has transpired the previous week. In many ways, I function as the clients' coach and supporter.

Monday, 9:00am

Monday morning is a bit different because my first appointment is with Jack. We normally take an hour or more to review all of the existing clients, including their status and opportunities. We discuss potential new clients, both commercial and personal, that Jack will be calling this week and in the future. We review the active and future recruiting assignments that Jennifer Marley, our recruiter, currently has in the house.

Our firm sells two services: outplacement and recruiting. Our primary outplacement customer is a business, a government agency, or a non-profit that is laying off or firing an employee. Part of the benefits offered to a terminated employee would be our outplacement support package, which includes office space, counseling, and training. The employee is asked to sign an agreement not to sue

the employer in exchange for this package of support benefits. Naturally, we sell outplacement support packages to individuals as well as employers. In fact, about 20% of our contracts come directly from clients or their families. We also provide larger group outplacement training and support where a business location is closing or being purchased, and there is a larger group of employees involved. Many of the same employers who purchase outplacement contracts have recruiting needs as well.

Our recruiting customers are often small firms without professional HR staffs looking to fill positions. Jennifer, a slender blonde with a fondness for bright colors, light-colored suits, and jewelry, handles all of our search contracts from various firms with openings. Coming to us with an HR and sales background, Jennifer has been with the firm for a few years and has done very well. She is in her early 30s, unmarried, and aggressive. She works with Jack to sell her recruiting services and helps him with sales when we're very busy. Her booming voice is similar to Jack's, and the two of them get along very well. She, like Jack, also drives a BMW. Hers is red with vanity plates that read "Love U." Jennifer is also in charge of the firm's website, where our outplacement clients can post resumes and Jennifer can post her open search positions.

Our Monday morning meeting also allows us to catch up on personal level because Jack and I are very good friends in addition to being business partners. We

review the staff schedules, sync our own schedules and vacations, and generally plan out the week. We review the business financial reports that Melissa prepared from the end of the previous week. I normally hand out the payroll checks to the staff right after this meeting, and Jack heads out for his first appointment.

For this morning's meeting, Jack smiles widely when we begin to discuss new clients. "Clear the decks for tomorrow morning, Will. One store of the large grocery chains in town is closing, and we're contracted to work with the terminated employees in a group outplacement program for the next two weeks. The store officially closes this evening." Jack goes on to say that the store will be asking all of the employees to report to a conference room in a local hotel at 9am Tuesday morning! The executives will make the official closing announcement at that time. We will be there to assist with issues and start the outplacement registration process.

We have done these group contracts several times before, but they really stretch our staff to the limit. We focus on training our four-step process (our ASAP Program), resume writing, and publishing research regarding other work options in the area. "There are about 150 employees, both full- and part-time. I've already notified the state unemployment office, and a representative should be at the meeting to take applications," Jack adds. About 30 of the employees will receive offers to transfer to another store; the remaining 120 will receive one week's

average pay for each year of service as severance and our group outplacement services. They will also qualify for unemployment of 16 weeks with an additional 12 weeks for any training classes. This closing is sad in many ways because a number of these employees had worked there for over ten years. I never will quite understand why our economic system needs to inflict so much personal pain.

After Jack leaves my office with a smile and a whistle, I send an e-mail and make a note to visit with Melissa and Mark Malone, our communications and writing consultant, this morning. Upon meeting him, you might think Mark a professor because of his tall, slim frame, glasses, suit, and his ability to command any room. Mark helps our clients prepare resumes and cover letters, learn interview skills, and perform any other research or preparation for their job search. He also teaches our group classes on job search training. Mark has a BA in English and communications along with 25 years of HR experience. As a result, he knows many of the HR managers in town and does some introductions for Jack. Mark is married to a state senator and now has an empty nest. The firm receives some outplacement and recruiting contracts from the state due to Mark's wife. Mark is easygoing, and he and I are very good friends.

We need to reserve the hotel conference room for the next two weeks for our training. You never know how many employees will take advantage of the outplacement training, but it normally runs about half the first week and tapers off

the second. We use a scaled back version of our normal training manual. Our primary focus is to teach job search skills and assist with resumes and questions. I will also need to look at my schedule for the next two weeks and talk to my wife. In the past, she has been able to help us out with registrations, keying resumes, and other administrative needs while the kids are in school.

Monday, 10:00am

Now that everyone is in, settled, and caught up on e-mail, I visit with Melissa and Mark about our preparations for the grocery store group program. Melissa agreed to prepare all of the materials for the employees; Mark will be in charge of the morning training sessions. I will start by giving my “It’s not the end of the world” talk at the announcement tomorrow. We will set up shop for the group in the same hotel conference room starting Wednesday for the next two weeks. Mark will teach a portion of the four-step, ASAP module each day, and the rest of the day will be spent assisting one-on-one. Melissa will set up a schedule each working day over the next two weeks for two of our staff to be present both mornings and afternoons. I will assist at the start and stop in as needed. My wife has also volunteered to help key and review resumes during the week and assist with registration on Monday morning. Melissa also agreed to be the logistics coordinator with the hotel: she’ll coordinate the room setup, coffee breaks, tables, computers, printers, local research

books, and anything else we'll need. We agree that we may need to hire some part-time staff, depending on schedules. One of us—Mark, Melissa, Jennifer, or I—will be on site each day.

I feel much better about our program for the grocery store closing. It is a blessing to have such talented, capable people on our staff! I have revised my schedule to block out tomorrow morning for the employee meeting.

I do always have a twinge of anxiety and sadness when dealing with these large layoff meetings because my thoughts go to Ramon. Several years ago, we were hired to provide outplacement services to a group of employees from a large office supply company that was closing. During the meeting, our firm was mentioned along with a time and place to start the outplacement program the following week. We were not represented at the meeting and did not have the opportunity to give a brief presentation. Ramon was a long-term employee who had worked his way up from the very lowest job to a supervisor position. We found out later that he was married, had two young children, and supported several other family members in his home country. Ramon was legal and had his green card, allowing for him to work in this country indefinitely. He obviously carried a lot of responsibility for his family. Ramon left the meeting not understanding what his options were, not understanding his severance package, and unaware of his

outplacement help. Instead, he was just very disturbed and angry. Later that evening, Ramon went down into his basement and took his own life.

When we received news of Ramon's story, I right then vowed to do everything I could to inform, answer questions, and calm the natural fear of change at any initial meetings with employees. My talk focuses on what to expect, benefit changes, unemployment, details of the severance packages, outplacement services we offer, and success stories. I especially emphasize success stories. We need our clients to move from focusing on anger to focusing on their future. This layoff is not the end of the world, just a bump in the road.

At the end of my talk, I'll introduce Mark and Melissa as the primary leaders of the training sessions. All three of us will stay in the room after the meeting if anyone needs to talk or has questions. Our first priority in these sessions is to let them know that God has a plan for them, a good plan, and that he cares for them. We will also screen for anyone upset to the point of doing themselves or others harm.

Monday, 11:00am

My first appointment of the week is with Richard, who has an MBA in biology from our upstate agricultural college. Richard is a tall man with a beard and glasses who often wears dark slacks and white shirts that are open at the neck. He also has

a pocket protector, which includes several pens and a small ruler. Despite his somewhat unassuming appearance, Richard is always intense and focused. Richard is into his 17th week of a 52-week maximum contract. He was laid off from his position as director of quality at a large meat-processing plant.

Richard had a history of tangling with the production management, and his actions often requiring the plant to do extra cleaning and extra testing. The year before he was laid off, he had a disagreement with the plant management over some test results and the conclusion that the plant should be shut down for more cleaning. He called in the FDA, and they closed the plant for several days, supporting his conclusion. However, the plant received a lot of negative publicity. They hired a vice president of quality a few months later, and Richard was laid off once the new VP got his feet on the ground. He is wrestling with his reputation in the industry as being a whistle blower and being responsible for a major marketing blow to the company. In short, he won the battle but lost the war. Richard received a year of severance pay and a year of outplacement support in exchange for agreeing to hold the meat company harmless and promising not to bring any legal action against them in regard to his firing.

Although Richard is 17 weeks in, he is still working through the first stage of our program. The *A* in our ASAP program stands for Attitude. Generally,

everyone starts here, whether they're shocked, angry, confused, depressed, or dealing with any emotions that are tied to losing their job.

In Richard's case, his primary issue is anger. He feels he did all the right things and was not treated fairly. We have been working on eliminating the anger and getting on with his life since he started with us 17 weeks ago. Unfortunately, he rashly contacted the FDA and burned his bridge with them before he started our program. He thought they should hire him as an inspector for the meat plant, but his focus was vengeance and anger, not inspection, which they could clearly see. I am not allowing him to apply or interview for a new job until we have the anger behind us. The anger will show during an interview and negate any chance of him getting the offer. Who wants to hire someone with a chip on his shoulder?

It was really a struggle for Richard during our first few meetings. He was so angry he would turn red and just about pass out! I encouraged him to vent and, boy, did he vent. I had no idea this seemingly composed guy spoke that kind of language. Melissa was so concerned she nearly dialed 911. And I even came close to sending him to his doctor for help, but we now seem to be making excellent progress—ever since I visited with his wife a few weeks ago. She understood and had seen the same problem in his attitude, and she seems to be able to reach him. He is working hard at putting the anger behind him, but we need to watch for depression.

Today, Richard and I had a nice discussion before he left for lunch. I recommended he should start taking advantage of the free health club membership that is part of the program—another way to ensure we keep his anger in check. I also suggested that he schedule an appointment with Mark to work on his resume. Hopefully, working on his resume will help get Richard focused on the future and prepare him to move into the next step of ASAP, Skills. The Skills step involves creating a resume, research, testing, networking, interviewing, and all of the skills needed to search for a job. I scheduled Richard for the 11:00am appointment next Monday. Hopefully, the resume will be completed, and the anger will continue to dissipate and be under control. Then, we can move into some preference testing and research.

I made a note in Richard's online data file to brief Mark about the anger issues with Richard and the probability that he would not receive a very good recommendation from the meat company. We have an online database that is accessible only to the staff where we track each client. I keep my clinical records private. Mark will help prepare Richard for explaining his situation to a prospective employer and handling the whistle blower label.

Monday, 12:30pm

Hey, it's time for lunch. A couple of us from the staff always announce that we are walking down the street to the deli or pizza place for lunch and that any and all are welcome to join us. We do this as a stress reliever for the clients and a nice way for everyone to network with each other. We encourage our clients to act as a group, socialize, and use each other's networks. When the weather is bad, we take orders and have lunch delivered into the large conference room.

Monday, 2:00pm

Diane is right on time for our meeting. As usual, she is conservatively dressed with little makeup or jewelry, and has her glasses hanging around her neck by a chain. She is six weeks into an eight-week contract she funded herself. Diane has a degree in hotel management and 15 years of experience, including managing a local 35-room hotel for five of those years. For the last three years, Diane has not worked because she had been caring for her mother, who lost her fight with cancer about eight months ago. Diane is still struggling emotionally with accepting her mother's death. We have been focused on getting by this emotional time in her life because it has affected her physical well being, as well as her self-confidence. Her depression has left her unable to interview and proceed with a job search. In many ways, she, like Richard, is stuck in the first step, Attitude. However, instead of

relinquishing anger, Diane needs to move past her grief and develop a more positive self-image.

Many of our clients have a problem getting past the Attitude step because they are mired in anger at their previous employer. Diane is not angry with anyone; she is just finding it difficult to manage her grief. I had suggested that Diane visit a friend of mine who is a grief counselor, hoping that a series of visits will help her get on with her life and manage her emotional issues.

As she walks into my office today, I immediately notice something different. Diane is actually smiling—something I have not seen at any of our previous meetings. “How are the sessions with the counselor going?” I asked as she entered my office. “He’s really helping me over my personal hurdles,” she replied gratefully. I can tell that Diane needs to get back to work for both her financial and personal well-being. Last week, we had agreed to extend her contract for a few weeks because she emotionally had not been able to progress in our four-step process. Today, she finally appears ready to move ahead.

“Let’s focus on the second step of our program, Skill Building,” I began, ready to move ahead with Diane. “We want to get you started on building resume, research, and interviewing skills for your job search.” During our meeting, Diane and I agree that she will focus on developing a new resume, researching potential local employers, and reviewing her interviewing skills this week. For these steps,

she will work primarily with Mark, Shirley, and Martha. Shirley and Martha, our receptionists, are both fun, always well-dressed, younger ladies who have a real knack for putting people at ease. They are both very skilled in research methods and computer literacy and are the go-to people for our clients who have questions or need technical support. Diane's goal is to use her experience and find a new position in hotel management. She is going to continue meeting with her grief counselor as well.

After Diane left, for the first time, I felt certain she would come out of this situation well and land on her feet. She had struggled so much emotionally, and it was not until she admitted she needed professional help that she started to turn the corner. Her mom would be so proud of her!

Monday, 3:30pm

Hannah is a very petite, dark-haired, intelligent young lady who is 4 weeks into an 8-week program. Her father purchased the 8-week outplacement package as part of her college graduation present. Hannah is a math wizard. Her major in college was advanced mathematics. She chose it because she loved math, but she had not given the job market a lot of thought. We had done well with the first two steps of our program: she was doing fine emotionally, had her resume in place, and had done some testing with Mark on various job matches. Insurance underwriting came up

very high on the list. We are now ready to start the next step in the ASAP program, Application.

The Application step is about applying the job search skills you have learned. In Hannah's case, she knows what kind of job she's looking for, is ready to find and research companies that have those types of jobs, can customize her resume for each job opening, and is ready to practice her interviewing skills. Another big part of the Application step is networking.

At this meeting, Hannah and I spent the majority of our time discussing the insurance underwriting profession. I suggested she contact Jack for an introduction to one of our previous clients, who works at a major insurance company's large regional office in our community. "Ok, Hannah, now that we're ready to apply the skills you've been learning, let's agree on some goals for the week," I began. "I think the first goal should be for you to obtain an introduction from Jack. Second, try to set up a time to visit with an underwriter to see what the job actually is on a day-to-day basis. Third, I suggest that you research the company and treat this as your first interview." Hannah smiled and quickly agreed to the goals.

She left quite excited to investigate her possible new profession. It never ceases to amaze me how our colleges (in Hannah's case, a major private university) allow young people to spend four or five years studying in a field without once discussing the job outlooks or where the jobs are. In my opinion,

many of our schools are not fully educating their graduates. Instead, they're just kicking them out of the nest to fly or to crash and burn. The amount of effort to obtain a degree, not to mention cost, deserves a better focus by the schools on preparing their graduates to find jobs. It would be great if every college graduate could come away with a solid understanding of what jobs they are qualified to fill and a polished resume.

Monday, 4:30pm

Marsha, my last appointment, arrived about 10 minutes late due to a traffic issue. She is normally quite punctual. Whenever Marsha is in the office, she is one of the most well dressed. The most striking thing, however, is her smile. Marsha is a good friend of my wife and has been quite active in our church, local non-profits, and Chamber of Commerce functions. Marsha is on the 15th week of a 26-week executive contract that can be renewed for another 26 weeks.

Marsha spent the last 14 years working for a very large equipment manufacturer. When she graduated from college, she went to work for the company. She started in the advertising department and, over the years, was promoted into more responsible positions. Her last position was as the company coordinator for the North American company dealer council. She hosted all of the dealer functions, prepared local advertising media packages including television

commercials, and generally represented the dealer's voice in national advertising. She reported to the vice president of sales. She worked very hard, was well paid, and married to her job. She was possibly too good!

One Friday, she received an e-mail from the president of the company saying he wanted to have breakfast with her early Monday morning. The request was not out of the ordinary. Marsha knew the president quite well and thought he had a project involving the dealers. She awoke that Monday morning to freezing rain, slowly drove to the café, and slid into the parking lot. She thankfully had a pair of flats to slip on because ice and heels would have been a disaster. She joined the president in a side booth, and looked around the normally busy café, where only a few people had gathered, due to the weather. After pouring her coffee, the president said that this was going to be a very difficult meeting. He proceeded to explain that she was being laid off effective that day. Marsha was stunned and stared blankly as he explained about cost cutbacks and other such things. He left for the office, and she made her way back to her car and back to her apartment. All she could think about was the full week of dealer activities that were underway, and she really did not know what to do.

Fortunately, we had an agreement with Marsha's company for executive outplacement services. Part of what she had not heard was his description of her package, and our firm's executive outplacement was a large part of that package.

She also had not heard that she was to meet me for lunch to discuss. Because I suspected she might not have been attentive that morning, I called her at home before lunch. We agreed to meet at my home in the evening. As we sat in my living room that evening, I tried to review the outplacement package, but she was still in denial and lost in the wake of what had happened. She really had no inkling this was afoot. I volunteered to contact her firm and arrange a time in the evening that we could retrieve her personal possessions and confirm some loose ends regarding her compensation and benefits. In reality, her package was excellent. She would continue to be paid for a year with all benefits in place, and she would have our executive outplacement package that included a private office, secretarial assistance, private phone numbers, and e-mail. She still wanted to complete several assignments, but I advised her to let go and start putting it behind her.

Throughout the rest of the week, she spent a considerable amount of time with my wife because they are good friends. That's when the anger started. She found out that her removal boiled down to the politics of the executives of the company. Most of the executives graduated from Ivy League colleges and belonged to the country club. Marsha was middle class, worked all the time, and did not participate in the country club. She spent her free time working with church groups and various good causes in the community. She is very pretty and

aggressive. I suspect she was considered a rival by too many executives. They banded together and got her removed.

Our meeting today is 15 weeks into the outplacement process. Marsha has already gotten over the anger stage and really did not have a depression stage. She continued with her volunteer activities and expanded her church activities. It took her a little while to realize the value and importance of her network in looking for a new position, but once she understood the potential, things happened rapidly. With her rather large network of friends and natural good work ethic, she moved quickly through the Skills and Application stages, soon had several interviews, and was now in the last stage, Promotion. The Promotion step focuses on your relationship with your potential employer, doing final checks on the company, asking any final questions, and deciding whether or not the job and employer are a fit for you.

At this meeting, we were to discuss an offer she received from a competitor of her old company. It would require her to move to New York, but it was a very impressive offer and used her skills. Financially, her old company had paid her well, but she was so busy that she had not developed the lifestyle to spend at her income level and had investments that made her financially independent at her current standard of living. Above all, she was struggling with the decision to move. All of her family and friends were local. My focus for the discussion was to point out to her that at her level, openings were very limited. I was going to advise her to

take a week, spend it in New York, look for an apartment, and see where she would feel comfortable.

She changed that plan immediately after we sat down. “Will, I know we’ve been talking about New York, but I’m considering another offer. I’m thinking about taking over as president of the local Christian food bank.” The food bank is quite large because it is a central food bank for all the local churches. They have over 40 full- and part-time employees, do a tremendous job servicing our local poor and needy families, and plan to expand into housing and possibly some medical services. A good friend of mine is on the board. The only problem with the offer is that the compensation plan is about 50% below the other offer! After about an hour discussing the various options, she headed home to do some serious thinking and praying.

Well, Monday has been a good day, except for the yellow Ford this morning. I quickly check in with Melissa to make sure everything is set for the grocery store group tomorrow morning. “The handouts for tomorrow morning are finished and ready to go, and I have the books for next week 75% complete. We’re meeting at the hotel at 8:00am for breakfast, right?” Melissa updates. “Yep, can you confirm with Mark that he’ll meet us there too?” I ask. “Already done.” She says, smiling. “And I have everyone scheduled to be on site at various times next week. It will

stretch us a bit thin, but we have managed well in the past.” “Great,” I confirm. Our meeting in the morning will give us time to compare notes, and I can review my speech with Mark and Melissa and insert their suggestions. The hotel is on my way to the office, so I will try to stop in every morning next week to help out and see how things are going.

It is 6:00pm, and I am going to be late for dinner with the family. I had better get the Avalon running in high gear. I lock the doors, turn off the lights, and head for the freight elevator. See you in the morning.

Key Points in Monday’s Stories:

Remember, being unemployed is not the end of the world! Whatever your situation, losing a job is definitely an ending, but it is also a beginning. In order to be successful in a job search, you must look forward rather than backward.

Richard’s story points out that anger is not your friend. Anger focuses you on the past instead of the future and on the wrong priorities, virtually ruining any new opportunities. Do not attempt to interview for a new position until you have your

anger at your former employer behind you. Your anger will show up at the interview. No one wants to hire someone with a chip on his or her shoulder.

Diane's story teaches us that there may be a time in our lives when we need professional counseling and assistance. Diane was going nowhere until she accepted her need and sought help. We also learn the value of patience, of waiting until you are ready to find a new position. You must have a positive attitude to best represent yourself in interviews. No one wants to hire someone who is carrying extra emotional baggage. The status of your emotional state is very evident to a skilled human resource professional during an interview.

Hannah's story is about putting the effort into your job search, learning the skills, and understanding your field and what your degree can do for you. It's also about networking and focusing your efforts on a selected industry. Through our company, she was able to network with Jack to break into her selected industry. Sometimes getting a job can be just as much about finding the right people as it is about your skills. It's never too early or too late to network or build your job-hunting skills.

Hannah was willing and started as an intern at minimal pay. She took the opportunity, treated it as a job interview, and was able to convert the internship

into a full-time position. Many companies hire interns or temporary employees in order to make better decisions regarding full-time, permanent employment. In this way, they can measure potential employees' skills, their ability to get along with the other employees, and their function within the company culture. Remember, treat any internship or temporary position as a long-term interview!

Marsha's story reinforces the basic principal of being prepared. Anyone can be fired at anytime. Many of the variables are out of your control: the economy, mergers, and acquisitions are just a few. Your firing will probably not be performance based. Even if you own your own small business, your success may not be performance based. The economy or a supplier might cripple your business. Marsha was truly prepared, had saved, and was financially secure. She maintained a great support network at her church as well as with her peers. Her preparation gave her the option of finding her dream job, the job the Lord had in mind for her all along!

Wondering if the clients were successful? See Client Updates: The Rest of the Story on page 86.

CHAPTER 2

Tuesday, 7:30am

Naturally, Tuesday morning was dark and rainy as I drove to the hotel to meet Mark and Melissa. It is surprising how much the weather can affect anger and depression. Thankfully, I have no yellow Fords to contend with this morning. Most of the employees of the grocery store will be confused, but some will be quite angry. It really helps to have a bit of sunshine. This weather makes it a bit difficult to recommend taking a couple of hours to go to a park and enjoy nature. I'll need to modify that suggestion in my speech this morning.

When I arrive, I see Melissa waiting at the restaurant to be seated. Mark shows up a few moments after I greet Melissa. It always amazes me how much breakfast Mark eats! Over breakfast, we discuss the plans for the day and review the notes for my presentation. As usual, Melissa catches a lot of details and points out that my date is wrong—this is really Tuesday. We made a few other tweaks and are truly ready for the meeting. As we finish breakfast, we notice that the employees are starting to arrive for the meeting. After leaving the restaurant and joining the employees in the large conference room, Mark, Melissa, and I fan out and listen for issues and discussions. It appears most of the employees know they are being laid off, and the word has gotten out. Several appear confused and several more appear angry.

Once everyone has arrived, the president opens the meeting and explains the economic and financial background supporting their decision to close the store. Many of the ex-employees appear not to listen and put on a brave front for their fellow ex-employees. The president then introduces the financial director, who explains the severance package and introduces the folks from the unemployment office. The manager of the local unemployment office explains the unemployment benefits and encourages everyone to sign up using their website because it is a much simpler process than waiting in line at their office.

Once all of that is taken care of, the human resource director introduces me. I know most of the employees will not remember a lot of detail. My main point is that this situation is not the end of the world. I also emphasize the outplacement benefits they have and encourage the employees to take advantage of this benefit. I touch on our four step process (ASAP) and share several recent success stories. I suggest that they all take the day to collect their thoughts and visit with their spouses and families, and I invite them to attend our first meeting in the morning. “Make a list of any questions, and we will help get answers in the morning. Remember, you have an excellent severance and outplacement package, but don’t take this package as funding to go on an extended vacation, expecting to land a job when you return. The job search process takes a full-time effort, starting tomorrow.” I emphasize again. Lastly, I share with them that statistics indicate

over 80% of individuals involved in a similar situation say they found better jobs than they lost.

At the end of my talk, I introduce Mark and Melissa as the primary leaders of the training sessions. We emphasize the sessions are in this same room, starting tomorrow at 9:00am. In addition, I stress that all three of us will stay in the room after the meeting if anyone needs to talk or has questions. We also screen for anyone upset to the point of doing themselves or others harm.

Mark, Melissa, and I spend the next two hours in various discussions with many of the employees. The vast majority are angry and/or confused, and they need some encouragement to return to our sessions tomorrow. Some actually seem happy or relieved. I have seen that situation several times in the past. Individuals who seem happy or relieved are normally not happy in their present positions and welcome the opportunity for a change.

I leave Mark and Melissa to clean up the stragglers and make the final arrangements regarding the room this afternoon for the next session. We normally have several computers, printers, and other items available. We set up lots of tables with chairs. Mark will start the session with the first step in our ASAP program, Attitude. Our goal is to have them past the anger stage and working on resumes, research, and other job skills by the end of the first week.

On my way to the car, I stop at a deli and buy a sandwich to eat on my way back to the office. Several of the grocery store employees have also stopped to have lunch. They all invite me to join them, but because it is already after noon, I need to get back to the office to be ready for my 1:30pm appointment. I told them I would bring bagels tomorrow morning! They seemed in pretty good spirits, given the situation.

Tuesday, 1:30pm

Bill is tall, rather large, and in his mid 30s. He often wears his dark hair slicked back along with a blue sport coat and a gold chain. He is 4 weeks into a 16-week contract that his father purchased for him. Though he has more than 10 years of experience in investment management, Bill is on parole from a securities fraud conviction because he stole money from one of the brokerage trust accounts. He served a bit over one year in a low-security prison and was released on parole to his father's home a few months ago. He is required to report to his parole officer each week, and I visited with her last week. A police officer and parole officer for a total of 20 years, Marlene clearly had seen it all, but she still seemed like a firm but understanding lady.

Bill is still in the first stage, Attitude, and did not learn a lot in prison. When we first met, he immediately proposed not disclosing his conviction and hiding the

facts on his resume. We argued a bit, but he now understands that truth is the foremost requirement on his resume. We need to word his situation in a sensitive way, but we also need to be totally honest!

During his prison stay, Bill's wife divorced him, he went through bankruptcy, he lost his home, and, even in the low-security prison, Bill was exposed to a very rough world. He emerged with low self-confidence and low self-esteem. In many ways, Bill has been hardened and believes that the world is out to get him. I am trying to counteract some of these effects and build his confidence and self-esteem. He made a mistake, paid the price, and now needs to get on with his life as a productive member of society.

“Bill, this week, I want to get you working with Mark so we can develop a resume that is skill-based rather than timeline based. A skill-based format will help soften the look of the time you spent this past year without being dishonest, and it can really emphasize your excellent sales skills and finance degree.” “Will, I know I can sell anything to anyone, if given the chance,” Bill commented.

We agreed to meet next Tuesday afternoon. I will ask Mark to work with Bill on other industries he may be interested in pursuing and start focusing him on research. With his sales skills, perhaps something in sales would be appropriate. Bill leaves with his homework assignment, and I prepare for my next appointment.

Jennifer peeks her head in my door after Bill leaves. She is all smiles. “One of my candidates has been offered, and accepted, an engineering management job at a local manufacturer!” she exclaims. I remember this could have been a tough find for Jennifer. The manufacturer needed someone with extensive high-pressure hydraulic experience, and not a lot of those engineers are looking to change jobs. But Jennifer did her research, found the manufacturers of high-pressure hydraulic products, made a few calls, and got names. She found an engineering manager of a small hydraulics company was willing to visit about the position. She also found a younger engineer of a larger hydraulics distributor. She was able to convince both of them to interview for the position.

They both came to our office, and she worked with them on their interviewing skills and resumes, in addition to briefing them on the company and the individuals conducting the interview. She even took the young man out and helped him pick out a nice suit for the interview. The experienced manager got the job, but the young man gained a tremendous amount of knowledge and training from Jennifer, who will keep him in mind for any future opening.

Tuesday, 3:00pm

Jonathan Woodley, our former city police chief most often called “the Chief,” is a large, stern-looking man with a deep voice who can definitely command attention

in a room. He is 6 weeks into a 16-week outplacement contract provided by the city. The city council and the Chief agreed on his outplacement benefits and package after several meetings. In my prior visits with the Chief, he was never angry, just burned out from the constant political process and the associated conflict with his need to protect and serve the citizens. He simply wanted out and does not want to look back. After more than 20 years in law enforcement, the Chief wants a total career change. No more being vomited on by drunks, lied to by politicians, misquoted by the media, exposed to ugly crime scenes, and pulled away from his family once too often!

Unfortunately, he has no idea what other work he would enjoy, so we are working through the Skills stage to get him the job skills he needs. The Chief is only 45 years old and has a long working career ahead of him. We need to find a new profession that suits him.

The Chief has a law enforcement degree from our state university and attended the state police academy and the FBI academy. He had a stellar record as a state trooper, was on the governor's security team, and became the state expert on court ordered wiretaps, microphones, and the use of surveillance equipment. He was personally involved in several successful, high-profile mob trials where the surveillance records made the difference. He still looks under his car every time before he opens the door and carries a gun strapped to his ankle.

With all of his law enforcement background, the Chief is a very black-and-white individual; there is no room for gray in his demeanor. Mark has worked with the Chief, and his test scoring is excellent. In addition to his law enforcement background, he is a very intelligent, well read, and educated man.

“Chief, today I wanted to start looking at activities you enjoy, hobbies, and anything else that might give us some ideas of professions to explore,” I started. “Well, hunting and fishing are two of my hobbies, but they’re hobbies, and I don’t want to ruin them by turning them into work,” The Chief answered in his booming voice. “I know we talked a little about this before, but what about becoming a lawyer?” I asked. “You have a lot of courtroom experience, and you definitely have the capacity to excel in law school.” When I had first mentioned this idea, he did not care for it because he felt he was done with criminals. I had pointed out to him that civil or business law was a completely different area that he might enjoy. “I’m still not sure, Will, but I will give it some more thought.”

After the Chief leaves, I visit with Mark, and we review the Chief’s testing profiles. We both conclude he would make an excellent attorney. His court and criminal law background would be an asset because he could apply them to the business world. In addition, he still has great contacts at the state capital. We have an excellent law school locally that is a part of our state university system, and the Chief’s undergraduate degree from the same state university would qualify him for

acceptance to the law school. “You know, a good friend of mine teaches at the law school. Let me see if I can set up a lunch or visit for the Chief,” Mark offers. I really like the attorney idea; it fits the Chief’s black-and-white profile, and I know he would make an excellent student.

Tuesday, 4:30pm

I’m meeting Margie for the first time. She has personally purchased an 8-week outplacement contract for herself at the recommendation of her father. Her father was a client and a successful graduate a few years ago. One of our receptionists, Shirley or Martha, will give Margie a tour, introduce her to the staff, assign her a desk, provide her with our written ASAP training manual, order some calling cards for her, and set her up with anything else she needs.

Margie is a very pretty African-American lady in her late 30s, who just retired from the Army as a captain. The Army was her life and provided a unique way for her to become a medical professional. When Margie enlisted, she became a medic, progressed up the ranks, did two combat tours, received several decorations, and used the training available in the Army to become a registered nurse and then a physician’s assistant. She still has the exceptionally straight military posture and bearing, which we will probably need to have her relax a bit for the civilian world. Margie has a wealth of leadership training, and I really

doubt she will be with us more than three weeks. She will be a treasured employee wherever she elects to work.

Margie's primary need is in the Skills stage. She needs education on how the civilian job community works because all of her experience is military. Margie joined the Army when she was 18, right out of high school. We spend quite a bit of time reviewing our four-step process, ASAP (or Attitude, Skills, Application, Promotion) in the manual she was given. "Margie, I also want you to meet with Mark and work on what characteristics you would like in your new job," I tell her toward the end of our meeting. "You know, I know my medical skills are marketable, but I just spent the last few years writing prescriptions in a base clinic. I'd really like to use more of my leadership and management skills in my next position," Margie offered. Our primary role with Margie is to help her sort these issues into the attributes of her preferred new position. Money is not an issue because she is drawing military retirement payments. Position fit is of primary importance.

We schedule her next appointment for Tuesday afternoon. She is also searching for a place to call home, and is currently staying with her folks. After Margie leaves, it occurs to me to introduce Margie to Melissa. Melissa has some excellent contacts in the local school system, and I understand they are searching for a school nurse administrator. The new administrator would hire, train, and

manage over 30 local school nurses. Margie might be an excellent fit there, and she would be a great role model for the students. I bet she could hold her own with the administration as well! But, I am definitely getting the cart before the horse on this one. I wished all our clients were this easy!

Hey, it's 5:45pm, and my son has a soccer game starting at 6:30pm. I gotta run! I ask Mark to lock up the office. See you in the morning!

Key Points in Tuesday's Stories:

Remember, being unemployed is not the end of the world! Instead, it is a stepping-stone to new adventure in your life. Even though losing a job can cause some grief, don't miss the opportunity to improve your life or change your work to better suit your interests. You can find your dream job or a better job by putting the effort into your job search.

In general, the grocery store group emphasizes many of the real world issues facing employees in today's business world. One specific issue is not to undervalue the benefits offered during your job transition. Take every opportunity offered to network, learn, and enhance your job search. Your fellow employees make up an

excellent network because everyone is in the same boat. One of the other affected employees may hear of an opening that best fits your skills. You want to put yourself in the position to hear about the opening and be recommended.

It is also another example of the fact that you do not control your own destiny. You may be the best employee in the business, but you can still end up unemployed. Your unemployment is not your fault, and other employers will understand. Get through it and move on. This transition is an opportunity, not a punishment!

Bill's story reinforces that honesty is always the best policy. Resumes need to be explicitly honest; however, they can frame your situation in the most favorable light. In Bill's case, his selling points were his skill sets, not his experiences. His resume would naturally focus on skills.

Jennifer's recruited placement of the hydraulic engineer points out the difference between a recruiter and outplacement/job search. Jennifer was focused on finding the best hydraulic engineer for her client. Sending her unsolicited resumes was a waste of time, unless you were a hydraulic engineer at the precise time she had a client needing a hydraulic engineer. The young engineer that worked with Jennifer did not get the job, but he received excellent training in interviewing, resume

preparation, and even how to dress appropriately. Please remember, recruiters work on specific assignments for their clients.

The Chief's story is a classic story regarding career change. In order to accomplish a radical career change, you must be truly dedicated and willing to start at the bottom of your new career. (Check your ego and income expectations at the door.)

A career change is loaded with financial hardship and the need for on-the-job training or formal education. If you find yourself locked into a career that no longer fits your needs, by all means, make the major step into the new career. The Chief was able to potentially use his old network in his quest for a new career, as well as transfer many skills from his old career. The more skills, experience, and network contacts that can be used from your former career, the better your success rate will be in moving to your new career. Don't complain about your career and do nothing, and don't wait until it is too late. Start the process today!

Margie's story shows that the normal assumption of concentrating your job search on your primary skill may not be the best option. Margie had a great medical background that was very easily converted into a new full-time job; however, Margie also had a wealth of leadership training. Leadership was what truly lit the

fire in Margie's eyes and was where Margie would be the most effective and successful.

Wondering if the clients were successful? See Client Updates: The Rest of the Story on page 86.

CHAPTER 3

Wednesday, 7:00am

I am stopping to have breakfast this morning with a friend and former client. His name is Farnum, but everyone calls him Fred. He is a trust officer in one of the better regional banks. His office is fairly close to ours, and he has been a great source of recruiting assignments because the bank is growing. When we got down to talking about business, Fred told me confidentially, “The bank is potentially purchasing our primary local competitor. In a lot of ways, it will be a great decision financially because we’ll be able to merge many office functions, close several duplicate branch banks, and sell the other bank’s large downtown bank building.”

It’s a great financial idea, but it will cause a large number of employee transfers and layoffs. Our local banks are in a period of consolidation and low profits. The real point of our conversation is that the bank would like to hire our firm to assist them in the people layoff and consolidation issues, assuming the deal is approved. They need to keep this very quiet until it is announced and approved. I agree to speak with Jack, and Jack will stop by with a private quote for our services. This could be our largest contract to date: hundreds of people may be impacted by this acquisition. The one saving grace is that the impact on the people will be spread over 12 to 18 months, which may make it easier for employees to

make the transition. Also, without this timing, our firm would not be large enough to handle this contract, and we will still need to hire several individuals to assist us.

When I arrive at the office, I truly relish sticking my head into Jack's office and telling him to clear the decks: he has a very large quote to prepare! That part is fun. I do not get to do that very often. I explain the deal to Jack, and we agree to quote this on a per person basis with outplacement services in our office for any exempt person (management, supervision, professional, salaried) and group outplacement for all non-exempt, (clerical, hourly paid personnel that receive overtime pay). He is all smiles when I leave his office for my 9:00am appointment. Financially, this is great news for our firm, but the deal will create a lot of employee pain and suffering.

Wednesday, 9:00am

George sticks his head in the door, then fills the doorway, enters, and then fills a chair. I don't generally hold my meetings sitting behind a desk; I have a couch and several upholstered chairs with a coffee table in the front of my office. The desk and chairs are in the rear. I find this arrangement much more conducive to my counseling discussions. When George comes in, he literally fills my large leather chair.

George is in his 9th week of a 16-week contract. He was a site and safety trainer for a large insurance company for 22 years. The company was sold, and he was laid off. George is such a nice guy and a family man, but his size, loud voice, and natural expression scare people. Even though he's an ex-Division I college football player and played for four years at our local state university, he really enjoys visiting with people and is a natural extrovert. George never made it in professional football. He has bad knees and was never able to compete after college. When you are 6'4" and 350 pounds, you need good knees.

I visit with George about becoming aware of his size and learning to lighten up his natural expression. "You know, being aware of yourself is just one of the things to think about when you're in the Skills stage and are learning skills for making a good impression," I say encouragingly. "I'm really self-conscious about my teeth," George admits. He had learned to cover up his lack of dental work with a more somber expression. "Well, what do you think about fixing any dental issues, especially because you still have dental insurance from your previous employer?" I offer. Who would believe that this big, strong guy is afraid of the dentist!

I also encourage him to continue to work his network contacts in the business and sports community. George was pretty well known in the local sports community, with his many college awards, and he had done a lot of community

sports activities. He agrees to work with Mark this week on his interview and network contact skills. This big guy with a big heart has a very strong network and should land on his feet shortly. We agree to meet next week. I will be interested to hear how the football luncheon fundraiser on Friday works out—George may even get a chance to meet the governor.

Wednesday, 10:30am

My next appointment is with Dave. Dave is a thin man with angular features and a muscular build who is almost never without his Harley and matching Harley jacket. He is 6 weeks into an 8-week contract his employer purchased for him. Dave had been an over-the-road semi driver for a local dairy the last 15 years. Early one morning several months ago, Dave was a bit tired and not very alert. He was involved in an accident that tied up a major highway for many hours. 6,000 gallons of milk made a mess, and several vehicles were involved in the accident. Four people were injured including Dave. The accident resulted in Dave permanently losing his Commercial Driver's License. He admitted that he had several speeding violations in the past. Our challenge with Dave is to progress through the Attitude step, move him out of depression, and find a new career for him.

Dave had already met with Mark and taken our tests for interest and capability. Dave really loved trucking—he even talked of moving to Latin America, where he could legally drive again. The tests did not indicate a major interest in any other field. Dave had always used computers and is quite technically proficient. He also scored fairly high on the quantitative and mechanical aptitude sections of the tests. It's obvious that Dave is a very intelligent man.

I review these results with Dave today, and we discuss his potential networking. Unfortunately, Dave's only networking opportunities are in the trucking industry and in his family. We need to come up with a target industry for Dave and build a resume. We discuss other jobs in the trucking industry that do not require a commercial driving license (mechanic, sales, dispatcher). Dave is going to give these other opportunities some research and thought. We can use his existing trucking network going down this path as well. "I'm really not into sales, Will. Honestly, I'd rather eat nails than be forced to sell something to anyone," Dave says.

We agree to meet next week. I made Dave promise not to leave for South America. Our goals for the week are to have his resume 80% complete, decide on his target industry, and start his research of every company in the area that's in his target industry. Shirley or Martha will help him with his research. They are quite

talented with the local databases, and we are running out of time and need to crank it up a bit.

Wednesday, 12:00pm

Lunchtime! It's time to get a group together for the sub shop down the block!

Wednesday, 1:30pm

Though I normally look forward to my appointments, I was not looking forward to this meeting. Rocky is 7 weeks into an 8-week contract, and we are failing. Rocky is in his early 30s, short, slim, and dark haired. Rocky's mother's church had purchased the contract for Rocky because he had been unemployed for about a year. I am convinced that Rocky has some mental health issues and quite frankly, he scares the staff. During our first two visits, Rocky was very angry with his prior employer. He had worked in data preparation for a local bank, processing mortgage applications forms and other forms on the second shift. He did not get along with the shift supervisor because Rocky was always late and left work anytime he felt the need. I called his supervisor, and he also said Rocky was quite threatening to several other employees including himself.

During our second session, I strongly suggested that Rocky put his anger behind him and let us help him find a new job. He did nothing with our program.

Instead, he just sat in the cubicle for a while and then left. Then, he quit talking. He has not said a word since. He comes to our meetings, not removing his dark trench coat, and frowns most of the time. He comes in every day for an hour or so and sits in his cubicle, again not removing his trench coat and not saying a word.

Today, I matter-of-factly tell Rocky, “This is not working. I am returning the church’s money because we have not been able to help you.” Then, I gently urge, “I’d like to suggest you find some other type of mental health counseling. You’re welcome to attend our Friday afternoon cake and coffee sessions each week, but you are no longer a daily client.” Rocky stares at me for a few moments, gets up, and leaves. I honestly believe he will explode someday. He is holding all this anger and is not able to deal with his emotions. I call the care pastor of the church that sponsored Rocky and let him know we are returning their money because we were unable to help Rocky. “Thanks for letting us know, Will,” he says, “I’ll try to visit Rocky and his mother this evening. We may be at the point of committing Rocky to a facility. Perhaps they can reach him.” I felt bad; we seldom fail. Rocky obviously has emotional problems that we are not prepared to handle or qualified to treat.

Wednesday, 3:00pm

Brandon is 8 weeks into a 16-week contract. Often sporting spiked hair and a hoodie, he's a very tall, thin electrical engineer who is also quiet and introverted. Therefore, he's still struggling with our first step, Attitude. It took two weeks before Brandon would look up whenever anyone spoke to him. Brandon had been laid off when his company was merged with a competitor. He had been with the company for 11 years. He joined the firm right out of college after an on-campus group interview.

At this point, Brandon is not really capable of doing an interview. He is an exceptionally brilliant electrical engineer with a lot of computer software interface experience, and he is only starting to open up with me. He still lives with his parents and, other than a couple of lunch buddies at work, has no other friends. His primary hobbies are computer games and writing software.

Brandon is such an introvert that it would take many months of therapy to get him comfortable enough to participate in an interview with any success. Earlier, I had visited with a good friend of Jack's whose brother is very successful in the computer game industry. Today, I ask Brandon if he would feel comfortable enough trading a few e-mails with Jack's friend. Brandon could learn more about the computer game industry and would not need to visit face to face because Jack's friend is in California. When I mentioned this idea, Brandon's face lit up a bit. "Yeah, I'd love to trade e-mails with Jack's friend to get some more info on the

computer game industry,” Brandon offered. He really opens up and becomes less introverted when discussing this subject. A good sign!

Wednesday, 4:30pm

I decide to leave the office a bit early today and surprise my wife. I have arranged for my mother to watch the kids so I can take her out to dinner. I try to do this several times each month because we both have hectic schedules and do not get a chance to spend much time together. She needs to know how truly special she is to me and to our family. She also really loves good Italian food!

Key Points in Wednesday’s Stories:

Remember, being unemployed is not the end of the world! Instead, it is a stepping-stone to new adventure in your life. Welcome the break in your work life and spend time in introspection and study. Remember to take the time to figure out what job is really right for you. Spend time discovering and honing the talents that might best serve you. Take some time off, but don’t waste the opportunities you have for finding the right path.

The breakfast meeting with Farnum touches on the world of mergers and acquisitions. In this case, it made sense for Farnum's bank to purchase the other bank and eliminate the duplicate back office costs, locations, and buildings. What makes obvious economic sense, however, can eliminate the jobs of loyal, excellently performing employees overnight. Your job is always in jeopardy from forces you do not control. I recommend that everyone focus on their current positions as independent contractors—always add value, perform beyond your employers' expectations, and always keep an eye out for your next position. Continue to maintain and expand your network of friends and business contacts. You should be especially careful to build this network outside your current employer and industry contacts.

George's story is a true testimony to the power of networking. George maintained his network of sports contacts outside of the insurance industry for over 20 years. These contacts eventually led to a new position in the insurance industry and expanded George's potential in politics and government service. George's story also points out that some physical attributes require work. George took special pains to become aware of his size and correct his perceived sour facial expressions caused by his dental issues. With Mark's and my help, he also learned to be very

Careful not to dominate the room with his loud voice and physical presence when interviewing.

Dave's story shows the importance of handling depression by forgiving himself and moving on to another position. We all make mistakes in life. Also, Dave has skills he does not value. Testing brought out the value of these computer skills, and we worked to see how he could use them in a new job. Dave is a great example of uncovering your existing skills to land a different job in the same industry.

Rocky's story is about problems totally outside the job search environment. Rocky had a mental illness and desperately needed professional mental health treatment. We need to treat Rocky with compassion and do our utmost to get him the treatment he needs. Rocky truly needs our prayers.

Brandon's story teaches us to focus on positive skills and downplay or avoid any shortcomings. Because Brandon had a problem, introversion, that needed professional assistance, he accepted assistance, and his quality of life is improving. Using a network contact, he was able to showcase his best skills in a controlled atmosphere. This approach made it possible for Brandon to successfully find his new position. Focus on your strengths, and avoid your shortcomings.

Wondering if the clients were successful? See Client Updates: The Rest of the Story on page 86.

CHAPTER 4

Thursday, 10:30am

After spending some time this morning with the grocery store group, my first in-office client today is Modo. Modo is one of my scholarship clients. Jack and I give out several scholarships for our services. We give these scholarships to various non-profits and ministries that focus on the disadvantaged. It's just one of the ways that Jack and I can give back to the community. Modo's real name is Thomas, but he has always gone by his nickname, Modo. When I first asked him what Modo meant, all he said was "Don't go there!"

Modo, a short, thin but strong, and hardened African American, is a part of a prison ministry called "Leaders." This ministry takes inmates who have leadership skills and focuses those skills on productive business avenues rather than into criminal activities when the inmates are released on parole. Over 50% of convicted felons return to prison after they have been incarcerated. Participants in Leaders have less than an 8% likelihood to become repeat offenders.

Modo is married and has two children. He is focused on being a good father and breaking away from his criminal past. Prior to his incarceration, Modo had been the leader of the local group of a fairly large, famous, and nasty motorcycle gang. Our testing had confirmed that Modo was a natural leader, very intelligent,

organized, and driven to succeed. All we needed to do was find a job that used Modo's talents and accepted felons on parole.

Modo is in the second, Skills, stage of our program. Today, we're focusing on Modo's resume and his personal appearance. "So, I know we talked a little bit about this last week, but I think we need to talk more about your personal appearance," I begin. "It's important to remove the tattoos on your hands and the small ones on your face. Business clothing can cover the rest of the tattoos. I'd suggest long-sleeve white shirts (without a tie is fine) and no leather accessories. Regular business shoes, such as loafers, would be good to have." Modo nodded, "I understand." He seems to get the drift of the conversation.

Modo agrees to work on these items and finish his resume next week. Modo also agrees to help us out at the grocery store meetings over the next two weeks. He has excellent keyboard skills. It will be good for Modo to see that he is not alone in his job search. Modo can also use the extra money because he only receives limited funding from the Leaders organization. Modo leaves our meeting to find Melissa and let her know he is available to assist at the grocery store meetings over the next two weeks.

Leaders is such a great program. We will do whatever it takes to see that Modo finds a great job.

Thursday, 12:00pm

Ah, lunch time. I joined the crew in the lobby, and we headed down the street for pizza!

Thursday, 1:30pm

Tim is 14 weeks into a 16-week contract. He is a neat guy—tall, slim, graying around the temples, and 63 years old. Tim had been a stockbroker for most of his career. The firm had been sold to a large brokerage house, and Tim was let go with several others. The new owner wanted a younger team. They fired everyone over 62 years old. Tim gathered all the fired employees together at his home, one thing led to another, and Tim ended up filing an age discrimination suit against the new owner together with quite a few of the other fired employees. After several months of bickering, they all settled for severance pay until they reached the age of 65, and the new owner paid their attorney fees. Tim used a portion of his severance to purchase our contract.

The really stupid part of this story is the ego of the new owner. He actually thought he was getting rid of the “dead wood,” as he referred to them. In actuality, the dead wood left with their contact and customer lists that had taken many years to assemble. Because they were fired, any noncompete agreements were void. The

only thing the new owner accomplished was setting up a powerful new local competitor.

Several of the fired employees immediately started setting up a competing brokerage service and had invited Tim to join them. Tim came to us, not sure if he should join the new firm, change jobs, or just plain retire and tend his roses. Tim's lifelong hobby was raising roses, and he was fairly well known in that area. He actually had developed several rose breeds that were named after his children.

Nate really helped us out with Tim. They were of similar age, and Tim had been Nate's broker for many years. Nate spent a lot of time with Tim considering various options. Tim was a type A and definitely not ready to retire, but he was also a bit bored with the brokerage business. Nate introduced Tim to a couple that owned a local florist and greenhouse. They were excellent at the florist side of the business but lacked a financial and business background. The couple and Tim clicked, and Tim was to become a partner in the business. The goal was to have Tim run the financial and business side and contribute his rose talents. The arrangement looked like a great match to me. Tim had asked me to review the partnership agreements. As he walks in the door today, he is all smiles. It is nice to see him so happy and at an excellent end to the last step in our program, Promotion.

As he makes his way through the office, Tim is even handing out roses to all the ladies! A little card attached to each rose gives the phone and contact information of the florist shop. His new partners had given him a large section of the greenhouse to raise his roses. He was also at work clearing up the financial details of the business and quickly had recognized his new partners had a real knack at the retail side of the business.

My counsel to Tim had been to make sure that each partner agrees on who had responsibility for what segment of the business. I encouraged them to meet each week, review each segment of the business, and discuss their plans going forward. The real issue is to make sure the partners have compatible values. Tim was a very honest, straightforward, no-cutting-corners-type person. Fortunately, his new partners were cut from the same cloth. They also attended the same Catholic church and had agreed to use their parish priest as the arbitrator, if there were any future disagreements. They were also both focused on the long-term success of the business, not the short term, and believed in building lifelong clients. Tim's roses gave them a unique product to sell, and they knew how to sell them! As he leaves, I wish Tim success and end up ordering a dozen roses for my wife. Tim's not bad at sales either!

Thursday, 3:00pm

A great day, we are making some headway! My next appointment is with Sally, a tall brunette in her early twenties who is very well-educated and well-dressed. She is in our first stage, Attitude, and going through a very trying time in her life. Her father had been the owner of a very successful local automobile dealership. She was raised in a very nice home and went to private schools and a private college. Though her degree is in art history, she often says, “My degree was really in cheerleading.” Her family traveled a lot and had several vacation homes.

The roof fell in about eight months ago. Her father’s business failed, he divorced her mother, and he left to live in Miami with his new girlfriend. Sally and her mother are living in a small apartment, and for the first time in her life, Sally needs to find a job. She has never had a job and has never been awake before 9:00am, even in school! Sally’s life has really suffered a significant emotional event. Both her work skills and her life skills are not focused on making a living. She was very comfortable at the country club’s annual ball, but has no idea how to make a living. Her biggest complaint is that she should have married one of the rich guys in college that she dated.

Sally has two big emotional problems to overcome—her extreme anger with her father and the economic and social embarrassment he caused both her and her mother. She also needs to face reality and get on with her life as it exists now, not as it existed in the past. It’s also important that she sell the yellow sports car she

drives because she needs the money and every time she looks at it, she gets angrier with her father.

Sally's mother purchased the eight-week contract for Sally. It was a real financial stretch for her, but she realized Sally needed help in this life transition. I ask Sally to schedule time to meet with Mark and take our battery of aptitude tests. Several things I knew Sally had going for her: she is well dressed, well spoken, and has an impressive network with her local and school contacts. The first challenge will be teaching her how to work and getting her excited about a new career.

“Sally, now you really need to treat your job search just like a real job. I'm expecting you to be in the office at your desk by 9:00am each morning,” I reminded her. “Work on building your resume, learning how to research, networking, and other job skills. Don't leave the office before 5:00pm unless you have appointments for your job search. And yes, schedule hair appointments after working hours.” I also told her she was responsible for her own parking tickets, and I would suggest she not wear a \$400 blouse to the office!

Thursday, 4:30pm

It has been a long day, including the meeting at the hotel and all. I am going to pick up the roses that Tim left me and head for home. It never hurts to bring roses home to Jane, but she will wonder what I did! Whenever I bring her something

unexpected, she always takes a quick look in the garage to make sure I did not do something really dumb. I gave her a real scare one evening when I brought home a friend's BMW.

Key Points in Thursday's Stories:

Remember, being unemployed is not the end of the world! Instead, it is a stepping-stone to new adventure in your life. Welcome the break in your work life and spend time in introspection and study. Spend time with your family and strengthen your faith. As you look for a new job, allow yourself time to find solace in your faith, family, and friends. Even if things are always going well, don't forget your faith. Your situation will improve; the Lord wants you to succeed.

Modo's success teaches us that a failed background or previous job does not guarantee you will continue to be a failure. The Lord wants you to be successful! Modo's primary strength was the recognition that he could succeed and the internalized leadership to pursue that dream. Modo was also the product of a great support program. When you have the opportunity, please support these great ministries and programs in your community. Christ loves us all despite our shortcomings and has a plan for our success!

Tim was a classic case of group age discrimination by a marginal employer. The employer's only accomplishment was to hatch a very potent competitor and pay a lot of legal fees. Tim could have ridden this horse into retirement; however, he elected to make the most of this opportunity and go with his heart and hobby of raising roses. He turned a very enjoyable hobby into a family business that could last generations. Tim teaches us that when we inventory our skills and do not forget our hobbies, they can be more valuable than our work experiences.

Sally struggled with losing her job. Losing a job is always a significant emotional event. Life change is many times not related to job loss. In this case, Sally's home and parents' divorce was the major event. Sally struggled with both embarrassment and anger at her father. She had to get past these issues and revise her lifestyle expectations at the same time. Sally needs to accept the fact she must work for a living, and she needs to use her skills, education, and experiences to get by. In reality, she is a very capable individual with great skills and an excellent network. In the end, Sally learned to merge these attributes into a successful transition.

Wondering if the clients were successful? See Client Updates: The Rest of the Story on page 86.

CHAPTER 5

Friday, 8:00am

The flowers went over well last evening. We attended one of the many school functions, a band concert. Loved the kids, but the band instructor really had a good time! She was so excited she just about fell off the stage. I guess the kids had a good night, and it must have surprised her.

Anyway, I enjoy Fridays. I stop and check in with Melissa and Mark to see how things are going. We are starting to field a few telephone calls, hopefully most of the store employees are taking my advice and having a relaxing weekend with their families. Our goal for the second and last week of our program is research and interview training.

Friday, 10:00am

Nick is a great guy to meet in the morning. He is in his early 30s, is tall, and has heavy black hair, but it's his ever-present smile and positive attitude that really stand out. Nick is 14 weeks into a 16-week contract he had purchased himself. We are running out of time!

Nick had done a tour in the Army as a purchasing agent for aircraft parts. The last two years of his career, he was located in France. He had met and married a French woman while he was stationed there. Then, he completed his enlistment

and moved to France with his bride. He worked in a French airplane manufacturing plant, purchasing various aircraft components and settled into the local French culture. Nick's wife left him about 6 months ago and filed for divorce. Nick decided to return to his hometown to be closer to friends and family.

I remember that Nick came into one of our first meetings whistling. I had expected a very angry, dejected individual. Nick never went to that place. He was upbeat and positive from the very first day. I asked Nick how he stayed so positive, and he said, "It is my faith. I truly believe the Lord has a plan for me. I understand, not all parts of the plan will be fun or without pain; however, he will care for me." Nick seems to enjoy everything about each day, a great example for our other clients.

The only issue I had with Nick was his insistence that he would find a new job purchasing aircraft parts. I tried unsuccessfully to counsel him to broaden his expectations because there were not a lot of aircraft plants in our area. In fact, I could not think of one, but he was insistent.

Today when Nick sat down, I knew he had something to tell me. He said, "Will, I visited with a family friend who knows a firm that makes military helicopters. They're only about 45 minutes from my apartment, so I went down to visit the facility. When I walked in, I had a chance to visit with the receptionist. I could tell as I spoke with her that she, like you, was impressed with my positive

attitude. More importantly, she was speaking with someone on the phone in French when I arrived. It was so easy to slip right into French when I visited with her. I got to meet with the purchasing manager that day. He looked at my resume and then asked about my French speaking skills. You know that after living there for five years, I am fluent. Specifically, the purchasing manager wanted to know about the aircraft engine parts for a French engine that I worked with in France. He asked me to wait a bit, and then the HR manager and the manufacturing manager stopped in to talk with me as well.”

They offered Nick a job on the spot, purchasing helicopter engine parts from their engine supplier in Quebec that only spoke French. They were having problems communicating their needs. The only problem would be the security clearance Nick would need from the military. Nick just smiled and pointed out that he had a very high security clearance in the Army, and it would only need to be updated. They asked Nick to stop back the next day for his offer letter and to complete the paperwork for the security clearance update. Hopefully, he will be able to start on Monday!

I am very happy for Nick and glad to see him reach the Promotion stage. His story would be such a great one for our cake and coffee meeting, the gathering we have every Friday. All in all, it was a great testament to Nick’s positive attitude! Nick’s attitude came from his absolute faith that the Lord would provide for him.

The Lord really came through for Nick, and Nick had a great time during the process. He never doubted, never worried, spent quality time with his family, worked hard at networking, kept up with his resume building, and did all the right steps.

I personally learned more from Nick than he could imagine. The contrast between Nick and many of my other clients was readily apparent. Nick's firm Christian beliefs made his job and personal challenges just another step in his life plan. I only pray my faith will be as strong as Nick's when life's adversities visit my family and me.

Friday, 11:30am

Deb was right on time for our meeting. She is 8 weeks into a 16-week contract. Petite and intelligent, Deb is also always well dressed. She is in her late 30s, is married, and has two teenage children, one of whom is a freshman in college. I've never seen Deb have a lethargic day; she always speaks quickly, has lots of energy, and is super organized. Deb was laid off when her company was sold to a competitor. The competitor promptly shut down the facility and moved the production to Mexico. The company produced all kinds of throwaway medical devices for surgery and patient care and had done exceptionally well. The owners had decided to take the cash and run.

Deb had really grown up in the organization. She started as the receptionist right out of high school. She met her husband, an engineer, at the company. He is also one of our clients. Deb had worked in virtually every area, including production control, inventory control, sales, advertising, credit and collections, and accounting. She was the resident expert on all of the homegrown systems and procedures. If you needed help with a project, you went to Deb. She has a great set of experience-based skills but no formal degrees.

Deb had been given the opportunity to attend local college programs with the company's tuition reimbursement program. She could have gotten a college degree free with this program. Deb made the classic mistake I like to call "fat, dumb, and happy." Of course, Deb is not fat, nor is she dumb. What she did was assume the company would last a lifetime, and that kept her from being motivated to make smart decisions and take advantage of some of the opportunities she had. She was very well paid, and the company recognized her valuable internal experience.

The internal testing with Mark indicated that Deb was a brilliant lady. She could be successful in virtually any career, but she had no credentials and no degrees, only her internal set of experiences with one company. Therefore, the biggest job has been to get through the second step, Skills, and give Deb the job search skills she needs to succeed.

Today's meeting with Deb focuses on her resume. We are preparing a skill-, experience-based resume rather than a chronological resume. Even with this type of resume, we're still running into the problem that it emphasizes her multiple skills but exposes her lack of formal training. We're also starting her thinking about what she would prefer to do the rest of her life. "I just don't want to trust anyone again with my future," she says. "As far as what I like to do, the time I spent in sales was really an enjoyable experience for me," she offers.

We agree that Deb will finish her resume this week, start documenting her network, and work on what she wants to do the rest of her life. We agree to visit next week on Friday morning. She will also work with Mark on her test results.

Friday, 1:00pm

My last appointment for the week! We have our cake and coffee meeting at 2:00pm and our staff meeting after the cake and coffee meeting. We like to get our office shut down by 4:30pm on Friday and give everyone a jump on the traffic headed for home.

Thomas had called a few days ago and asked to see me. Thomas was a graduate of our program. He had accepted a job about two months ago as the controller of a small local manufacturing company. Thomas is a really nice guy, is

a little quiet, has his CPA, and has worked in public accounting for about 10 years. He is an excellent accountant—well trained and highly skilled.

He came to us with a goal of transitioning out of public accounting into private accounting. He was tired of the long tax season hours, the push to sell extra services to his existing clients, and the pressure to acquire new clients. He was very aware that sales were not his strong point and that he would not progress any further in public accounting without being able to sell.

After about six weeks, Thomas connected with the controller of a local, family-owned manufacturing company. The controller was searching for his replacement when he retired. He had been one of the founding employees of the company and had been with them for over 20 years. Thomas interviewed well and visited with the president and other members of the senior leadership team. He was offered the position and accepted the job several months ago.

As I welcome Thomas into the office, I can tell he is upset. “I just resigned my position and would like to return and finish my original contract,” he said, obviously unhappy. My first response was welcome—all of our graduates know we always have an open door. Then I naturally asked, “What happened?” “Well, the first few weeks were fairly normal,” Thomas said. “The retiring controller worked with me every day, trained me on the industry, systems, and files. I felt good about the position, but I really spent most of my time with him.” He met the

other employees, including his staff, who were supervised by Mary, the senior accountant. He sensed some problems with her and the rest of the staff but chalked them up to the transition.

Making a long story fairly short, Thomas later found out that Mary had been promised the new controller position several years ago. The president did not feel Mary had the training or skill set and had asked the retiring controller to break his promise and hire someone outside the company. Virtually the entire office staff as well as several members of the senior leadership did not feel this was fair.

The office staff banded together and made sure everything Thomas needed or touched was in error, misfiled, or vanished. Everything was done with a smile, however, and Thomas soon realized he was going to fail in this position. He was the topic of many negative rumors, and his car was actually damaged twice in the company parking lot.

Thomas is not angry; he is disappointed. He clearly could have contributed to the success of the company. Instead, he wasted several weeks of his life in a new position that was not going to work. Even though he was not aware of any issues with Mary when he accepted the job, Thomas wondered what he had done wrong not to have picked up on the very negative situation.

My response is fairly straightforward. “These situations are very difficult to detect from the outside looking in. In some cases, you have the opportunity to visit

with your staff and other members of the team; however, in most cases, you take a tour of the facility after hours and do not meet your team until after you have been hired. You were correct in walking away. Our focus now is to get you back into the research and finding another position.”

We agree that Thomas would rejoin our office on Monday. Shirley and Martha will get him reconnected and settled into one of the large cubicle areas. Our failure rate in job placement is very small. We teach our clients to do their homework and focus on jobs where they will succeed. I am sure Thomas could have done well if the existing staff had allowed him to perform.

Thomas, a couple of the other clients, and I head down the street for a very large helping of Chinese food. Chinese food has become part of the Friday lunch ritual. We need to make sure everyone saves room for dessert. We have our cake and coffee meeting this afternoon.

Friday, 2:30pm

Alright! The culmination of our week. Cake and Coffee Time!

Each week, on Friday afternoon, we gather everyone left in the office, staff and clients, for a celebration meeting. Each client is asked to give an update on their search in the form of a 30-second speech or whatever best suits them. The clients are encouraged to make suggestions, share network contacts, and contribute

anything else that might help others. This meeting gives each client a chance to practice speaking in front of people. They also get to know each other during the week in the library and office cubicles. We also celebrate any graduations of clients accepting jobs and hear success stories. The primary purpose is to raise morale for the weekend and generate a support network group. All graduated or ex-clients are invited to this meeting too. It is an excellent forum for our staff so they know each client's status and needs. As I mentioned earlier, we then hold our weekly staff meeting after the client meeting is over.

Nick announces his new job with the helicopter manufacturer. His success story is a special one because he is going through a divorce, a move from France, and the need for a job. Nick could have easily sunk into despair and depression. Nick's faith, good humor, and personal confidence made his time with us a pleasure. Nick has been very effective in raising the confidence level of all our clients. Nick's unwavering confidence in finding the exact job amazes me even today. The Lord was truly active in Nick's life.

Everyone does a fine job of sharing his or her weeks and job search status. A lot of excellent suggestions are fielded by all. I always judge the effectiveness of these meetings by the amount of discussion, bantering, and networking suggestions.

Thomas also chimes in with his story of picking the wrong job. He receives several networking suggestions and a hearty welcome back to the group. We also receive several volunteers to assist us next week with the grocery store group. It's a nice way for them to make a few extra dollars, network a bit, and share their knowledge concerning our ASAP program. All in all, a successful meeting. Tim even brought in roses for all the ladies!

After the cake and coffee, the clients normally leave for the weekend. The staff and I take this opportunity to lock the doors and have a general staff meeting. Everyone was there except for Jack and Nate. Jack tries to make the meetings, but he had a sales call this afternoon on the golf course.

We discuss several operational issues for next week and the large group meetings at the hotel. Shirley and Martha make a presentation on a new computer system proposal. Everyone seems impressed. I will discuss them with Jack on Monday, and I am sure we will give them the green light. Our existing system spends quite a bit of time being repaired by the Maytag repairman! We break up the meeting around 4:30pm, and everyone heads home.

I collect all my weekend reading and check the lights and doors. I am pleased that you had time to spend with me this week. Hopefully, you have a better appreciation for the life crisis of being without a job or possibly being a square peg in a round hole and needing a new career path. I suspect we will both face this

crisis several times in our lives. You are always welcome to stop in for cake and coffee—every Friday afternoon at 2:30pm!

Key Points in Friday's Stories:

Remember, being unemployed is not the end of the world! Instead, it is a stepping-stone to new adventure in your life. Welcome the break in your work life and spend time in introspection and study. Spend time with your family and strengthen your faith. Use the time to expand your personal network. A truly successful job search is the result of many different components. Don't forget to reach out to personal contacts and work contacts as you work through a transition.

Nick is a great story of personal faith and the confidence, the understanding and direction this faith brings to the job search. Nick truly understood that God cared for him and had a plan for him. Nick also understood that not all parts of this plan are without pain. We learn from pain. Nick's story also underscores the advantage of a secondary skill in the job search. Nick's ability to speak French got him the job that he was professionally trained to accomplish. Nick's ability to research the opening and the network that made him aware of the opening was all part of the

process. Nick's positive attitude and smile were the key ingredients in his successful job search.

Deb teaches us that degrees and formal training do matter when trying to open doors for a new position. Take advantage of all opportunities for training and degree study. Many employers offer tuition payments for degree classes, and it always surprises me that so few employees take advantage of these programs. Deb also teaches us that learned skills can also be transferred into a new industry. Deb took her extensive skill set and turned it into a successful new position with her own business.

Thomas teaches us to be realistic and make the hard decisions. In this situation, Thomas did the right thing. He did not stay and fight the losing battle; he accepted that he had made a mistake and quickly moved on. Several years later he commented that his decision not to stay and fight was not easy. He was comfortable in the knowledge that the Lord had something better in mind. Sometimes, despite all the research, we make a poor selection of a new position. Remember, the employer is selling us the new position. We need to have the faith to back up and restart the job search. It is very difficult to see the day-to-day

environment of a new position from the outside. Also always remember, you are in charge of your future!

Wondering if the clients were successful? See Client Updates: The Rest of the Story on page 86.

Client Updates

The Rest of the Story

Richard: *Richard was able to get by his anger and pull out of a depression. After 46 weeks in outplacement, he accepted a position as one of our local city health inspectors at approximately half the salary he was receiving before he was laid off. He plans to put in a few years with the city and repair the damage he created when he was angry with the FDA. He hopes to eventually join the FDA as an inspector in the food processing industry and regain his old salary level.*

Diane: *Diane struggled with her emotional roller coaster and, quite frankly, probably still does. After several interviews, she admitted she probably was not ready for another hotel management position. The jobs demand long hours and are very stressful. She also found that her hotel computer system skills were quite outdated. New, more effective software had been introduced to the hotel industry, making some real gains in efficiency possible.*

Diane decided she wanted to stay in the hotel industry and refocused her search on a desk clerk position. She could relearn the software and possibly work her way up into management. Working as a desk clerk would also not be as

stressful and would give her more time to settle her emotional issues. Diane was hired a few weeks later as a desk clerk in one of the larger hotels in the area. She is doing well and has been promoted to a desk supervisor. She will do fine, especially because she allowed herself the time and professional help she needed in the healing process.

Hannah: *Jack introduced Hannah to his contact in the HR department of the local regional insurance office. Hannah accepted placement as an intern in the underwriting department for the next 8 weeks. She was encouraged to study and take the licensing tests for underwriting. The insurance company paid for Hannah to attend a preparation class they were sponsoring for employees who were interested in taking the exams. Hannah studied hard and passed her exams in the fall. She was offered and accepted a position in the underwriting department. Early the next spring, I received a wedding invitation from Hannah. It seems she not only became an underwriter but also was going to marry one!*

Marsha: *After much soul searching and prayer, Marsha decided to take the offer and become the local food bank president. The Bible says that the Lord has a plan for all of us. I suspect Marsha made him very happy with her choice. She is doing great and already into a big fund drive for building resources. She is truly helping*

people every day. I asked her the other day if she thought about her old corporate life. She looked at me and said, "What corporate life?"

Group Grocery Store Outplacement: *In general, our outplacement program and support for the grocery store employees was well received and successful. We provided three weeks of primarily half-day training and support, and we contacted other grocery store chains in the area to have them attend meetings and hold interviews starting the second week. We used our contacts as we got to know the employees and solved a few unemployment problems with paperwork assistance. The local TV station did a nice story. Mark did a fine job teaching and implementing our ASAP program on a very fast track to get the employees where they needed to be. We found that many of the employees suspected the end was coming because they were very close to the business.*

We estimate that after three weeks, 65% of the employees we worked with had accepted new jobs, and we are confident the remaining employees will find employment by the time their unemployment runs out. Several employees opted out of our services and went into special training classes. Two even went back to college! The contract was very profitable for the firm. Melissa, Mark, and Jennifer did the bulk of the training and counseling. I stopped in every morning to visit with a few of the more challenging individuals. In all, I put our effectiveness in the

90%+ range for the entire employee base—an excellent showing. Our historical statistics tell us that 30% of the employees who qualify for our services never show up. A real shame!

I must mention a couple of the success stories. Shirley was a lead checker and had worked for the store for six years. A single mom very dedicated to supporting her family, she tested as exceptionally sharp and excellent with people. Shirley accepted a position as a teller with one of the local regional banks. The last time I saw her she had progressed to head teller and was doing fine. She had truly found her niche.

Fred was one of the store's janitors. He was learning disabled but did a fine job. After the grocery store, Fred moved into the school system as a janitor for one of the grade schools. I suspect Melissa had something to do with his position because of her ties to the school system. Fred really enjoys working around the children and receives help from one of the teachers with his reading skills.

A really neat story was Don, the store's general manager. He elected not to transfer to another store and after 16 weeks, moved into the mall as the manager of a new camping/outdoor store. (Don's first loves and hobbies are camping and hiking.) Whenever I stop by the store, he has a smile from ear to ear. He writes a hiking column for the local paper and is the president of the local hiking club. He

has also been approached to do some TV short subjects involving hiking safety.

What a great fit. Tell me that the Lord did not have a plan for Don!

Rita's story was the best of the bunch. She was the assistant baker in the bakery at the store. Although she was offered several other positions, Rita elected to start her own specialty bakery. We arranged for her to become involved with a retired businessmen's group to assist her with the financial details of opening her own business. She is doing great and is the top-rated store for wedding cakes in the area. The cakes for our Friday cake and coffee celebrations come from her bakery.

Bill: *Bill completed his 16-week contract with us and decided to attend realtor training. He passed the exams and is currently a locally licensed realtor and really doing quite well. Bill is using his sales and business skills and abiding by his parole. After his parole is completed, he will probably sit for the realtor broker exam. His self-confidence is returning, and his family has become very supportive. The convicted felon stigma was very difficult for Bill to overcome, but working for himself as a real estate agent, he proved to all he has turned his life around.*

The Chief: *The Chief eventually warmed to the idea of attending law school. He visited with Mark's friend, a professor on the law school staff, and they became*

good friends, who both liked hunting and fishing. The Chief applied for and was granted a very nice scholarship covering his costs. How nice to have friends at the State Capital! The Chief graduated with honors, passed the bar, and is now practicing in a local law firm. His specialty has turned into real estate and commercial law. He still looks under his car and carries a gun, but he has made a very successful career transition. No one vomits on him anymore, and he can sue the politicians if they lie to him.

Margie: *We introduced Margie to Melissa. Melissa spent a lot of time with Margie, they had dinner a few times, and Melissa introduced Margie to our church. They became great friends. Margie not only had all the technical medical skills but also was an excellent leader. Melissa introduced Margie to our local school system, and taught Margie how the school administration really functioned. Margie accepted a position as the head of our local school system's nurse and health services department at the end of week three of her outplacement contract. I expect she will do very well, and this position should make great use of her technical and leadership skills. She will also be a great role model for many young ladies in the school system. Though some folks have problems in certain rough and tumble schools in our city system, after two combat tours, I doubt Margie will have any problems.*

George: *George landed on his feet several weeks later. At the football luncheon, George got a chance to meet the governor. He even had the opportunity to share his current job search with the governor and was able to give the governor his card. As it turned out, the governor is a big football fan and remembered George. Between the governor's support and Mark's wife's support as a state senator, George ended up working in the state's insurance licensing office. It's a great fit for George because he travels the state, visiting various insurance companies and reviewing the state's licensing requirements. George has also become a spokesperson for the governor's job safety program and gives luncheon and dinner talks all over the state. He is able to merge his football stories with his safety message. Something tells me that George may run for political office in the future. I would sure vote for him! And he has a dazzling smile now!*

Dave: *Even though we ran out of time with Dave, he decided to stay in the trucking industry. With Mark's help, Dave left with an excellent resume that was skill-based rather than chronological. I counseled Dave to be totally honest about his licensing situation during interviews. We focused on his existing network and three weeks later, he became the night shift dispatcher for a local freight company. He had excellent benefits but not quite the level of income he had driving. Dave said*

he did not mind the hours because they were similar to his old driving schedules. He did mention that his computer skills were really appreciated and that he may take on more in that area at his new company. Dave should do really well in this position because he can draw on his extensive experience in the industry.

Rocky: *Rocky showed up at several of our Friday cake and coffee events. He would sit in the back of the room for a while, still wearing his trench coat, not saying anything to anyone. He would abruptly get up and leave. We then did not see Rocky for several months. I found out later that Rocky had gotten into an altercation with someone at a fast food restaurant, was arrested, and was in custody. After psychological testing, the judge sent Rocky to a mental health treatment center. As far as I know, Rocky is still at the center. Hopefully, they can help Rocky turn the corner.*

Brandon: *Much to my surprise, Brandon hit it off with Jack's friend, Marlin, in the computer industry. I later found out that Brandon was a fairly famous hacker and gamer under the alias BeachBoy! That really did not fit with the Brandon I know.*

Marlin was familiar with BeachBoy and immediately offered Brandon a job in his new company that focused on developing computer security software. The offer allowed Brandon to continue living at home, and he could work from home if

he preferred. Brandon accepted the job and became famous for his ability to test and crack computer security systems. I counseled Brandon to find some therapy and suggested several friends. He continues in a weekly support group and has made excellent improvement. He has also become involved in the singles group at his church and is assisting the church with their computer structure and security. I understand he actually has a girlfriend. Now that is progress!

Modo: *Modo was born and raised in a very low-income and dangerous area of our city. I later found out that Modo was a slang term for motor. He had received this nickname as a teenager because he and a couple of his buddies could steal the motor out of a car in less than three minutes. It's not something you want to put on your resume, but it did show his natural leadership and intelligence. Many of his friends stole tires or hubcaps, but the real money was in the motors.*

Modo finished his high school degree in prison. He also completed the "Starting Your Own Business" program offered by the Leaders prison ministry. Modo was able to attend technical school and graduated with his certification in automotive technology. Our firm and the Leaders program arranged for the scholarship. Modo started out working in the shop of a local auto dealer and worked his way into managing the parts department. The last time I visited with Modo, he was doing well and had provided a nice home for his family. He planned

to send both of his children to college. His oldest was a very good football player and may also receive an athletic scholarship.

Modo is also giving back to the program, quite literally, Leaders saved his life and his family. He is a volunteer counselor at the prison for the Leaders program and is also quite active in his local church. His success has also made him a great role model for the young teens in the projects. He is called quite often to visit with young teens that have been arrested at the police station. Modo calls that his ministry!

Tim: *Tim and his new partners did very well. They ended up selling as many roses on the Internet as they did locally. The unique types of roses really contributed to the success of the Internet sales all over the country. Tim's grandson, also named Timothy, joined the company and shares his grandfather's love of roses. The grandson had attended an agricultural college and received a horticulture degree. He claims his exposure to his grandfather's greenhouse while growing up gave him the desire to study horticulture. I suspect the grandson will take over for Tim, when he does decide to retire. Tim's partners are middle-aged with children still in school. Most importantly, Tim's only complaint was, "Why didn't I do this sooner?" Another great example of the Lord knowing what he was doing all the time!*

Sally: *It took Sally a good four weeks of intensive counseling, education, and self-assessment to recognize her real life situation and decide to take charge of her future. She will always be somewhat angry with her father, but hopefully time will heal those wounds. Sally's test scores, college training, and comfort in the higher-end lifestyle gradually got her excited about interior decorating. She applied to and was accepted at the local college of art and design as a resident assistant. She obtained her interior design certification and earned her first income as well. Recently, Sally partnered with one of the design school professors and opened a local interior decorating and design business. With Sally's local contacts, she will do quite well. Sally smilingly pointed out to me that she does not book any appointments before 10:00am!*

Nick: *Nick went on to be promoted several times with his new helicopter company. He never could tell me exactly what kind of helicopters they produced, but he was quite proud of them. We placed several of our clients with manufacturing backgrounds with Nick's company. Nick became a good friend and remains single, in spite of my wife's introductions! Nick is very active in his church and is currently responsible for the men's ministry. I suspect Nick may move into full-time ministry in the future.*

Deb: *Deb really struggled with what she wanted to do with her life. Her lack of a degree really hampered her obtaining a position in a new company anywhere near her old salary and benefits. Deb's engineer husband found a new position very quickly, a nice promotion from his old position.*

After taking a lower-paying clerical position with another company, Deb quickly grew bored. She eventually ended up going into business with her father. Her father was retired, but he had owned a local retail shoe business for many years and really helped Deb managing her start-up business. Deb and her father bought a local franchise for an ice cream store. Deb went to our state college and took their summer course on producing ice cream. Her business skills were a great help in running the business. Her family really supported her efforts, and her children even worked for her during the summer. She skillfully located her business very close to our local tourist boardwalk. Her business was a great success story, and I expect her income far exceeds what she earned in her old job. Most of all, she seems really happy with her new career, and it did not require a degree to open the door! She also pointed out to me that she gets a three-month vacation every winter!

Thomas: *Thomas was not with us more than three weeks. He had already completed all his training, had an excellent resume, and had continued his networking. Most of our graduates continue to maintain their networks; they know how valuable a good network is when you are looking for a new job.*

Thomas interviewed at and was hired by one of our local private colleges. He not only functioned as their controller/chief financial officer but also really enjoyed the opportunity to teach accounting. He completed his Masters degree and is working on his Doctorate in accounting. I suspect he will become a full-time accounting professor in the future.

The manufacturing company where Thomas had accepted his first job was sold within the year. The president was not able to regain the leadership and confidence of the staff. The business was merged into another one on the west coast and was closed. No outplacement or severance packages were offered.

CONCLUSIONS

The following paragraph is mentioned in each chapter of this book. It is the most important guidance for any career transition. If you only retain one thought from this book, make it this paragraph.

Remember, being unemployed is not the end of the world! Instead, it is a stepping-stone to new adventure in your life. Welcome the break in your work life and spend time in introspection and study. Spend time with your family and strengthen your faith. Use the time to expand your personal network.

Anger, despair, depression, and revenge have no place in a search for a new position. Whether it's by yourself or with professional help, get over it, put it behind you, and move on!

Searching for a new job takes effort and hard work. Treat it like a job. Do your research, write a killer resume, build your network, and sell yourself!

Take the time to write the best resume for you. It might be chronological or experience-based. If you are really struggling, find a professional who can help you achieve what you want to achieve. Never lie or attempt to omit information on a resume.

All the knowledge in the world is worthless unless you get off your chair and apply that knowledge. You will not build your network by sitting at home. You are in charge of your own future!

Take the same desire and effort you displayed in your job search and apply it to your new position. Look on your new job as an opportunity to learn, excel, and perform at your highest expectations. Always remember, the average job tenure is three to four years, so prepare yourself for your next job.

Take advantage of all opportunities whether its free education from an employer, a gym membership, or even outplacement services from a former employer. You never know when you'll need a contact you made or a skill you learned.

It's never too early or too late to start the job hunt process and learn more about your current or potential career.

Don't undervalue your network. Any of the contacts you have—family, friends, previous co-workers, just to name a few—could be the gateway to your next job.

Be willing to start at the bottom if you're just starting out or if you're starting a new career.

Treat temporary or part-time work as a long-term interview. Many companies hire interns or temporary employees in order to make better decisions regarding full-time, permanent employment. In this way, they can measure potential employees' skills, their ability to get along with the other employees, and their function within the company culture.

Always be prepared for your next job. Anyone can be fired at anytime. Many of the variables are out of your control. Focus on your current position as an independent contractor—always add value, perform beyond your employers' expectations, and always keep an eye out for your next position. Continue to maintain and expand your network of friends and business contacts. You should be especially careful to build this network outside your current employer and industry contacts. Save, maintain your network, and keep your eye on opportunities and options.

Use all the skills you have, apply them to your job search, and use them to get the job you want. Secondary skills, such as languages, can also play a role in the job hunt. Don't forget about hobbies; they too can be valuable experiences.

Don't always follow the money. Look also for the position that best fits you.

Sending a recruiter unsolicited resumes is a waste of time, unless you happen to fit a certain profile at the precise time a client needs that profile.

Focus on your strengths, and avoid your shortcomings.

A mistake or failure in your past does not have to hold you back in the future.

Be realistic and make the hard decisions. Sometimes, despite all the research, we make a poor selection of a new position. Remember, the employer is selling us the new position. We need to have the faith to back up and restart the job search. Don't stay and fight a losing battle.

Individuals who have a strong personal Christian belief weather the storm of unemployment with a smile and a great positive attitude. They understand

transition in their lives is for a purpose, not something to be feared. They take the opportunity to strengthen their relationships with their spouses, children, and families. They build their networks. They relax. They are rested. They interview well. They are on top of their game.

“For I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD. They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.” Jeremiah 29:11

ADDENDUM:

The ASAP Four-Step Process

ATTITUDE: (A Positive Attitude), Anger control, Over the Shock, Past the Depression, Wants to Get to Work, Open to Suggestions, Focused on the Future

SKILLS: (Develop Skills and Focus) Skills and Aptitude Testing, Research Methods, Importance of Networking, Resume Building, Interviewing, Search Skills

APPPLICATION: (Apply Skills) Application focus, Research, Networking, Applying, Searching, Communication Skills, Interviewing Skills

PROMOTION: (Back to Work), Applying, Interviewing & Evaluation of Offers, Succeeding In the New Job!

ATTITUDE

Attitude is the first step in our four-step process. Everyone starts here! The major component of the Attitude step is to form a personal positive attitude and an

adequate level of self-esteem. Time will heal the shock of a firing, and a positive attitude will normally solve any issues with depression. A positive attitude will display itself in your openness to suggestions and a focus on the future and your next position. Anger is the primary reason many individuals fail to develop a positive attitude.

Are you angry with your previous employer, supervisor, or manager? Do you honestly think they were wrong in firing you? Does the situation continually enter your thoughts? Do you feel betrayed? Do you plot revengeful things to get even? Jesus says in Mathew 5: 21-22, “you have heard that our ancestors were told, ‘you must not murder. But I say, if you are even angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the court. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell.’

Murder is a terrible sin, but anger violates God’s command to love. Anger creates a seething bitterness that ruins a person’s outlook on life and leads to emotional stress, negative physical symptoms, and a focus on revenge. When you should be focusing on your future, you are focusing on your past. You are hurting yourself and your family. You must put your anger behind you before you can gain a positive attitude. A positive attitude is required for a truly successful job search.

Additionally, human resource professionals will see your anger in an

interview—it cannot be hidden. No one wants to add an angry person to his or her staff!

If you honestly feel you were discriminated against in your firing, I suggest finding a good attorney, explaining your case, and asking the attorney to take your case on a contingency fee. If the attorney agrees to take your case on contingency, turn it over to the attorney, put it behind you, and focus on your new job search. If the attorney declines to take your case on contingency, put it behind you, and focus on your job search. Either way it is out of your hands, your personal focus needs to shift to the future.

SKILLS

Are you focused on the future and ready to go back to work? Do you have a positive attitude about yourself? Are you open to suggestions? If your answer is yes, you are ready for the second step of our process, Skills.

Looking for a new job is a job in itself. As with any job, you need to master a set of skills to effectively succeed at the job. In this step, you need to inventory the skills you currently possess, find out what kind of jobs you prefer, and see what companies may have openings for these jobs. You also need to write an effective resume tuned to the job opening you want and develop effective interviewing skills when you apply for these positions.

Outplacement firms, state employment offices, career ministries, websites, libraries, and books are all available to assist you in refreshing and obtaining the skills needed to focus and support your job search. Even if you plan to work in the same industry/skill area, you still need to develop these job-searching skills. One caution: do not get so involved in the pursuit of excellence in these skills that you forget about your job search.

Let's assume you are a civil engineer. What companies have openings for your engineering skills and experience? How do you find these companies? How do you know they are good companies? How do you get an interview? How do you find out what openings exist? What should you say on the interview? How do you get an introduction? The skills you need for your job search has really very little to do with your skills as a civil engineer or whatever your experience may be!

Many unemployed individuals skip this Skills step and jump right into the Application step, interviewing for jobs and frantically calling everyone they have ever met. They become disappointed because their success is poor. They do not recognize they need to develop skills to search for a job the right way. You may blunder and bluster yourself into a new job, but it's not likely that the job will be a good fit or you will be successful. You need patience and effort to develop the right skills and knowledge to succeed in this job called job hunting!

The most important piece of this step is learning how to network. The rest of the items in this step, (Aptitude Testing, Research Methods and Sources, Resume Writing, Interviewing) are fairly easy to learn and apply. All kinds of help and assistance are available for brushing up and learning these skills. The public library is an excellent place to start with a wealth of materials available in each area. The Internet is also an excellent source, but be careful not to jump to the next step before you are ready. Outplacement firms and State employment offices have excellent hands-on support in learning these skills. Check with your church because many churches sponsor ministries focused on assisting and giving you hands-on support (www.c3n.org and www.crossroadscareer.org are just a few examples). By contacting your church, you have also taken the first step in networking!

Perhaps your fearful mental picture is calling all your friends, business contacts, and family members begging for a job. That is not networking, that is a waste of time! In the Book of Esther, the Bible describes the ultimate focused networking experience. Esther and Mordecai are able to save their people with networking at the highest level. In this story, God blended both character and circumstances to accomplish his plan. Your networking experience will be shaped by God's plan for your life! You need to be open to this networking experience.

When my daughter first graduated from college, she had all the proper skills training. She had an excellent resume, she had researched the local area for the companies where she would like to work, she had practiced her interviewing skills, she knew her top selling points, and she had an excellent elevator speech (30 seconds). She decided to put her suit on and visit five of these companies each day and network with the receptionist. She planned to leave a resume and find out the name of the person she should contact within the company. She also knew most jobs do not make the local papers or Internet job sites and knew from experience that many receptionists are trained to recognize good potential new employees and are often part of the Human Resources department. Her visiting these companies is what we mean by networking!

By the way, she never made it past the second company. The receptionist looked her resume over and asked her to have a seat in the waiting room. She was interviewed and hired the next day. My daughter had done her homework and was ready to be successful in the next step, Application!

APPLICATION

A person ready to embrace the Application step of the job-hunting process knows what kind of job they are looking for, knows what companies may have those jobs in the area of their search, have excellent resumes ready to customize for each

potential job opening, have practiced their interview skills, are confident in themselves, and know how to research a potential employer. They are actively building a strong network that they will maintain for their lifetime.

A strong network is invaluable in finding a person that works in a target company that will mention your name to the Human Resources department or give you a picture of the culture within the company. You may know someone in your network that happens to know someone in the company—often they can set up a lunch meeting with that person. It is amazing what you can learn about the company that will help in the interview process. In addition, a resume forwarded by an employee always gets a better review than an unsolicited resume.

A recommendation I always make to individuals involved in the Application phase is to set a contact goal each day. Set a minimum goal of ten contacts for each day you are in this phase. A contact may be a phone call to friend to see if they know anyone that works in one of your target companies. A contact may be, as it was for my daughter, getting off your chair and visiting the receptionist or that company. A contact may also be attending a trade show, a local job fair, your small group from church, having lunch with one of your networking friends, or visiting an outplacement or consulting firm. Remember to take notes and follow up with thank you notes where appropriate.

When you get the interview, it is not time to party! It is the time to do your research. How should you dress? Call the receptionist and ask or go park in the parking lot about quitting time. Dress one level up from most of the people you see leaving the building. Prepare your questions based on the company research you have done. Most companies have websites. Become familiar with the products, mission, customer focus, and anything else that seems important. An informed question sends the message that you thought enough about the interview to invest time in researching the company. Review your interview techniques and be on time. Be careful when you are waiting for your appointment in the waiting room. You are already in the first stage of your interview, so leave the cell phone in the car. Watch and listen to the traffic in the reception area; it's amazing what you can learn.

Remember, your primary focus at this point in the process is to get the offer. Questions involving benefits, pay, and other such items should wait until after you have received the offer. Smile, always be truthful, look the interviewer in the eye, and force the interviewer to ask you questions by sitting quietly. You do not need to fill the dead air space! Skilled interviewers will attempt to get you talking and rambling. If the interviewer asks you if you have any questions, use your prepared questions from your research. Focus on getting the interviewer to give you as much information about the job and company as they are willing to share. Remember,

they have your resume, so point out your top three selling points. Collect business cards and send a personal thank you after the interview.

If you are invited back for a second interview, you are progressing to the Promotion step, the last step in the ASAP process. You need to double your preparation and efforts. A second interview means you have made the cut and are one of two or three finalists. You need to take every opportunity to sell your strong points on this interview. Plan on being interviewed by several new individuals. You will be probably be interviewed by your potential new supervisor/manager, possibly the human resource manager, and the department manager or owner of the company. Do your homework, focus on selling yourself, and use your prepared questions. Again always remember to collect business cards and send a personal thank you to each individual after the interview.

A few days later, you have a phone call or an e-mail announcing that you will be receiving an offer. Congratulations, you have progressed to the Promotion step.

PROMOTION

The Promotion step in our process is focused on the relationship between you and your potential or new employer. You normally have had a second interview, have an offer in hand or a promise of an offer, or have several offers. One offer might

have already been your dream job. You may have already accepted this offer, but I stress that this step is just as critical as the first three steps, Attitude, Skills, and Application. Always remember the Lord has a plan for you. Does this job fit that plan?

Up to this point, the ball has been in the employer's court. You have been focused on obtaining an offer. When you have an offer in hand, you do not need to accept the offer immediately. Most companies will give you a few days to consider, talk it over with your spouse, family, and individuals from your network that may have additional information on this company. You should also spend the money to run a credit report and check with the local better business bureau on the company at this time.

Now is the time to call with any questions or concerns regarding the offer. The only time I would attempt to negotiate salary would be if the salary is not acceptable and will force you to decline the offer. Be honest, this is not the best time to negotiate a higher salary. It is quite acceptable to negotiate or question various benefit options including vacation.

You should have the written offer from the company before you agree to accept the offer. It's amazing how many times you can get into the situation where what you heard is not what is written. In addition, if you do not understand all the

points of the offer or if you have benefit questions, now is the time to totally understand the offer.

Once the offer is accepted in writing, your word is your promise. We keep our promises! Now, focus on being the best employee they have on staff! Arrive early, stay late, and perform to the absolute best of your capability. Why? This job is the job the Lord had planned for you, and your real boss is the Lord!