

Posted on Tue, May. 26, 2009

## **Hustle, Inc.**

Dawn Klingensmith

If the economy begins to recover in 2010, as some experts suggest is likely, the unemployment rate – which hit a 25-year high of 8.5 percent in March 2009 – will begin to decline. Another labor statistic is not likely to be so responsive. Some 7.8 million people work part-time for economic reasons, a 3.1 million increase since January 2008. That number includes workers who'd prefer full-time employment but are settling for less, either because their employers cut their hours or they can't find positions, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.



Many of these workers may believe their part-time gigs are temporary. But it won't be long before the situation is the new "business as usual," says management consultant B.K. Simerson, Tradewinds Consulting, St. Charles, Ill., author of "Fired, Laid Off, Out of a Job," (Praeger Publishers, 2003).

There's a sea change occurring in the U.S. job market, Simerson claims, and the day is coming when full-time positions with benefits will be a rarity.

Faced with a disintegrating economy, companies are eliminating positions, outsourcing labor, cutting hours and taking away benefits. Simerson believes this is not a temporary setback but an evolutionary change in the U.S. job market.

Simerson is not alone in his view that the workplace is rapidly changing. Employer-employee relationships of the future will be fundamentally and irrevocably transformed, says Michael Williams, dean of Touro College's Graduate School of Business, New York.

"Organized employment as we know it is evaporating already," says Williams, whose current work focuses in part on emerging trends in human capital management and organizational change.

Williams sees a future work force comprised mostly of temporary, contractual workers who move from one paid arrangement to the next and individuals who “cobble together” a living by working multiple jobs.

This shift, for most professionals, will involve “applying the same skills and assets but in different ways,” Simerson says.

While these individuals might have a primary occupation, in order to make ends meet and fund health insurance “they will have secondary and perhaps even tertiary jobs, all relating to a certain set of skills,” Williams says.

Others will be forced to attain new skills and enter new fields. Although many laid-off workers don’t realize it yet, “It’s not a matter of waiting. They won’t be going back to the same businesses. Why? Because those jobs will never exist again,” Williams says.

“Wall Street is gone. It’s a wasteland. Auto manufacturing in five years will be gone,” he says, meaning that mergers and automation will make most U.S. auto industry workers superfluous.

White-collar and factory workers alike are watching jobs vanish and prospects dwindle. “Never again will organizations be as fat as they were in the past,” Simerson says.

Nearly a decade ago, countless professionals were pushed out of high-tech telecommunications jobs, never to return. University enrollments went up, entrepreneurialism took off and folks entered different fields, such as real estate.

The current economic crisis is producing similar reactions. The economic stimulus act includes more funding for college financial aid, so many displaced professionals are likely to go back to school, Williams says.

Entrepreneurialism will provide for more than half of the gross national product, which is testament to Americans’ resilience and ingenuity, he adds.

“This sounds counterintuitive, but this is the best time in the world to be out of a job,” Williams says.

Forced to adapt early on, laid-off workers already will have aligned their capabilities with job-market realities while others struggle to accept the fact that “job security” has gone the way of the buggy whip.

“It’s time to step back and assess the business environment and ask yourself, Do I have the assets required to be successful, or do I need to undergo additional training or education?” says Simerson.

As we near the day when employment will be widely regarded as a temporary arrangement instead of a secure, long-term situation, Simerson believes we must revise our ideas of careers and even businesses.

“I don’t think in the future we’ll refer to individuals as full-time or part-time employees,” he says. “We’re going to come up with new terms: contractors, associates, operatives.” Simerson predicts household income streams will become multimodal as people earn money from whomever they can.

And despite the upheavals he sees ahead, Simerson believes people should hunt for jobs that add meaning and satisfaction to their lives.

Job loss, along with the prospect of cobbling together a living, ultimately puts workers in a position of power.

“We get to decide how to spend our time and exert our energy,” Simerson says. “People who are laid off and experiencing a lot of pain inevitably come out on the other side better off, because unemployment leads to soul-searching.”

And taking periodic timeouts, by choice or by circumstance, allows workers to ask themselves whether their contributions still seem meaningful and what might be done to maximize satisfaction in all aspects of life.