



Working the Web

Georgette Gouveia | Aug-d20-10, 03:18 PM |

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Moving past jobless stress

The age of anxiety is apparent in Jeffrey D. Levine's private practice. More of his patients are struggling with joblessness or job insecurity, says the Valley Cottage psychotherapist.

“It's the universal dilemma,” he says.

Actually, the national unemployment rate is about 9.5 percent, with some experts suggesting that it may be even higher when factoring in those who have stopped looking for work. Anecdotally, the anger, dread and depression surrounding unemployment or the fear of such is palpable in the blogosphere.

Levine has seen it all – the attendant sleeplessness and fatigue; the loss of appetite or overeating; the short attention span; the feeling of being overwhelmed; the rage, often directed at those closest to the unemployed; the loss of desire.

Ironically, he says the way to avoid the psychological ravages of continued unemployment and even job anxiety is to embrace the situation.

“Biologically, we are programmed to seek pleasure and avoid pain,” Levine says. “At some point, the essential lesson of pain and loss has to be experienced. You have to learn to step into these things deliberately....When there is all this stress and fear...each of us can control the attitude we have.”

Easier said than done, of course. But there are job seekers who are proactive with their lives. Hastings-on-Hudson copy editor Buddy Waller was among those, along with this reporter, who were laid off a year ago by The Journal News, a Gannett Inc. publication in White Plains.

“It was disappointing but not surprising,” he says.

And while he describes his continued unemployment as a “sad circumstance,” he's buoyed by a recent interview at the New York Post and a test he took to be eligible for state clerical jobs, on which he earned a perfect score.

He was scheduled to take a weekend test for Portfolio Media's Law360: The Newswire for Business Lawyers and is casting a wider net by applying for positions out of state and out of the region.

In the meantime, he continues to lunch with former colleagues and to see Broadway plays and exhibits like The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Picasso show (twice) and its Vermeer show (four or five times). He's also discovered the joys of walking around Hastings' two square miles.

It helps that he is doing reasonably well financially, having first tapped into Gannett's transitional pay plan, which was tied to state unemployment benefits, and then into a pension that is separate from his 401k.

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For others, however, the jobless recovery is a crushing nightmare of exhaustive and exhausting debt and the dread of a future in which the American dream of home ownership and retirement has vanished.

Waller thinks about the future occasionally: Will he be able to retire?

“But I figure, Why borrow trouble? ... I worked with people whose job was their life. I felt sorry for them.”

In a sense, Waller is the poster guy for what Levine advocates for the anxious.

Says Levine: “Even if you’ve lost your job, you still have who you are.”

Unemployment tips

While you may be jobless, you remain employed in the business of life. Here are some of psychotherapist Jeffrey Levine’s tips for finding your way through a tough time:

“Take care of your health. Get good nutrition, some exercise and an appropriate amount of sleep.

“Equally important are rewarding social relationships.

“Make your job getting your next job. Do it with enthusiasm and conviction.

“It’s not uncommon to have some disappointment. You can’t allow a blip on the screen to dissuade you from putting one foot in front of the other.”

Change your spending habits. “You can’t fill up the inside from the outside. It’s an inside job.”

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