



JOB

In the Mix

BY ANNE SIEGEL

If one of your New Year's resolutions is to get a job, Ellie Mixter-Keller feels your pain. A Mequon marketing professional, Mixter-Keller recently faced a job layoff of her own. During long months of searching for a job that would provide a good fit for her skills and talents, she became active in several professional job networking groups. She is now a board member of 40Plus of Southeastern Wisconsin and a co-moderator of the Mequon-based Lumen Christi Employment Network.

When she advises others in her networking groups, she realizes that a lot of them haven't searched for work in years or, in some cases, decades. Her message is this: Trade in your outdated job-hunting methods for strategies that actually work.

Networking is essential. Mixter-Keller is a big fan of professional networking groups. "These groups can alert you to developments in the 'hidden job market' (job openings that never are advertised). They can also connect you to someone who has ties with a certain company that may interest you." Why is this so important? "You have to stand out in the deluge of applications companies are receiving these days," Mixter-Keller says. "Have someone you know recommend you and/or personally carry your resume to the hiring manager." Companies often don't have the staff to sort through all the unsolicited resumes they receive. "You need to find some way (for your resume) to float to the top of the pile."

Develop an effective elevator speech. Regardless of your career field, job seekers are now sales people who must market themselves to prospective employers. An "elevator speech" (typically a 30-second assessment of your job background, achievements and capabilities) encourages job seekers to concentrate on their core strengths. "It's very

empowering and refreshing to focus on your strengths and your potential value to a company, instead of worrying about not measuring up to the laundry list of competencies attached to every job description," she says.

To determine your core strengths, friends, family and former co-workers are a good place to start. "Ask people who know you to identify what you are really good at," she says. Another route is talking to hired experts. "A good career coach, resume writer, counselor or recruiter can usually drag it out of you."

Post your profile on LinkedIn.

Think of LinkedIn as an electronic Roladex, she advises. This free Internet site connects users to colleagues, friends and friends-of-friends. In short, anyone who may help you get a job. "Think of it this way," she says, "If you asked everyone you knew if they knew someone who worked at Company X, they may come up blank. But LinkedIn never forgets. Your co-worker's brother may work at a company you'd be interested in working for, but you never think to ask him." Using the networking tools provided on LinkedIn can make those connections, she says. It can also enhance your relationships to people you've "met" online in a number of ways; she points out, such as responding to questions posted in discussion groups.

Stay positive. This is one job strategy that never changes. "A layoff is an emotional punch in the gut that can stop people dead in their tracks," Mixter-Keller says. "Staying positive in this economy is an action, a choice made every day. I think of it as a suit of armor." She advises job seekers to stay away from negative-thinking friends. She says she "gravitates like a moth to a flame" to friends with a more upbeat attitude. "I seek them out, and I choose to spend time with them," she says. In addition, she suggests doing something to make others feel good. Here's one of her top tips. If you've had a bad few months — or a bad year — just try to wipe it out of your mind. What happened likely wasn't your fault, and it wasn't something you could prevent. Even your bosses aren't to blame. To succeed, she says, "you need to make this a 'do-over.' Start fresh."

For her part, Mixter-Keller says she has emerged from her layoff in a better state of mind. "I learned a lot about myself during this adventure. I stretched, and I didn't give up or give in."