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Job hunt: More Americans hit the trail

By Marilyn Gardner | Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

June 8, 2007, is a date indelibly fixed in Gary Walters's memory. That's the Friday his boss at Nokia called to inform him that his job had been eliminated.

“He told me that by the end of the day, my access to e-mail and the company network would be terminated,” says Mr. Walters, who spent 10 years as a marketing manager with the firm, most recently in White Plains, N.Y.

It is a scenario repeated often these days. So far this year, 668,000 Americans have lost their jobs – with more layoffs to come in the wake of this month’s turmoil on Wall Street. The unemployment rate has risen to 6.1 percent, although those with bachelor’s degrees account for just 2.7 percent of the unemployed, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Many fields have openings, workplace specialists say. Among them: biotechnology, healthcare, higher education, energy, engineering, green technology, and commercial construction.

“There is hiring going on,” says Kip Hollister, CEO of Hollister Inc., a staffing company in Boston. “Technology is very busy.” A survey from Hyrian, a recruitment provider, shows that 40 percent of job candidates receive two or more offers during their current search despite the ailing economy.

But for those who have not been in the employment market for five to 10 years, the landscape has changed dramatically. “The skills

of looking for a job are different,” Walters says. “I remember being much younger and driving around filling out applications all day. Now I’m doing it electronically. I would love to have a nickel for every e-mail I’ve sent out in the past year with a résumé attached.”

Résumés have changed as well. “A résumé has to follow a particular format so it’s scannable by a computer,” Walters says. “If the combination of words they’re looking for doesn’t show up, it won’t get read.”

Walters has also learned the importance of keeping in touch with friends, alumni associations, and business acquaintances while cultivating new contacts. The mantra for job-seekers is network, network, network.

“There is an 85 percent probability that your next job will come from someone you know,” says Scott Kane, cofounder of Gray Hair Management in Chicago. “Only 7 percent of job placements come from postings and another 7 percent from recruiters.”

LinkedIn, a networking site for professionals, has become a popular tool. “LinkedIn makes it incredibly easy for people to reach out to their networks and explain what kind of job they are looking for, where, and why,” says Leila Bulling Towne, an executive coach in San Francisco. “Once someone in your network gets an e-mail that you are looking for a project-management position, he is already primed to think about his contacts and can easily forward your message.”

Career fairs offer another way to connect with employers. Last week hundreds of women at all levels of experience turned out, résumés in hand, for a job fair at a hotel in Boston’s Back Bay sponsored by Women for Hire, a recruitment firm.

“There’s definitely more interest among attendees, but there aren’t as many employers,” says Tory Johnson, the firm’s CEO.

Earlier that morning, 95 women crowded into a meeting room to hear Ms. Johnson offer tips.

“Anytime you apply for a job, you should contact someone at the company so your résumé doesn’t end up in a black hole,” she advised them. “Tell that person, ‘I found you at LinkedIn. I realize we don’t know each other, but I’ve applied for a job and wondered if you would take a look at my résumé.’ ”

Waffles Natusch, president of The Barrett Group, a career management firm in Warwick, R.I., cautions that people go wrong when they turn their résumé into a handout. “It loses the perceived value of the document. Mass mailings just don’t work anymore.”

For Walters, there has been one regrettable misstep. When an executive marketing firm contacted him, offering to rewrite his résumé and cover letter and distribute them to appropriate companies, he signed up. “The whole package deal was a little over \$9,000,” he says. But problems abounded. “They were not distributing my résumé, just my cover letter. Every day they sent me a list of jobs on job boards. I can do that myself for free.” He has

had better success going through the career section of company websites.

“More and more, hiring managers are bypassing recruiters to save recruiting fees and passing along job postings to their online networks,” says Liz Lynch, founder of the Center for Networking Excellence.

Skills and experience represent only part of a candidate’s qualifications. “Employers are looking at cost per head count right now,” Ms. Hollister says. “They need individuals who can wear many different hats and are humble about it. What doesn’t work is coming into an interview with a big ego and controlling the conversation. You need to be a listener.”

Nearly half of respondents to the Hyrian survey said the worst part of the job search is never hearing back after an interview. “Employers need to have better manners,” says Daniel Solomons, CEO of Hyrian.

Still, Hollister offers this reassurance: “There

are good jobs to be had and good companies to work for with great values. They're looking for people with the right values to match up. Employers' expectations have gone up, but it's not all doom and gloom."

If rejection does occur, Johnson urges job-seekers to brush themselves off and move on. She adds, "You should think, 'Someone has to get that job. Why shouldn't it be me?'" "

Source: Christian Science Monitor

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