

BETWEEN JOBS

Ten Ways

TO HELP

A FRIEND WHO'S UNEMPLOYED

AN ALL-WEATHER FRIEND BOOKLET

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Chapel Hill, North Carolina

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*For everyone
who faces the challenges
of unemployment.*

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Isolation is by far the most debilitating issue of unemployment, besides not earning a living. I remember when I was a child hauling bales of hay with Gramps on the Saskatchewan prairies. The stories. Times were hard, and what I remember most is how each ranch would help out the next. Harvest, fire, death. Helping each other was a matter of survival. It was a hardscrabble life. Our needs brought us together. Now I feel I'm in a time and place not relevant to those principles. It's sad, because our self-reliance is fragmenting society as a whole. It doesn't just affect people who are unemployed.

—Tom, 52

I've applied for every job opening I can find. Nothing happens. I've had a few interviews lately, but they seem doomed from the start. They're looking for people who have been out of work for a few months, not a few years. I feel too ashamed to call my friends. They've stopped calling me. I'm beginning to wonder if my unemployment will be permanent.

—Linda, 35

Between Jobs: Ten Ways to Help

ONE. UNDERSTAND THE LOSS



THE LOSS OF A JOB OR CAREER BREAKS DOWN into many immediate losses—of financial security and lifestyle, of benefits, of structured time, of the social perks of the workplace. It shakes the sense of self and place within the world. Think of how often we open friendships with the question *What do you do?* Work is one of our main identities. But more to the point, work is the way we survive.

Being fired (or retired early, redirected, de hired, selected out, transitioned, asked to resign) causes nothing short of grief, and people react to it with shock and anguish. “When a parent or child dies,” says Diane, an unemployed attorney, “you feel not only the void from losing the individual, but also the relationship that has been a part of how you define yourself. I’m no longer the caregiver, or the child, or the parent. Now that I’ve lost my job, I am no longer the breadwinner. Think of it as a death.”

The grief from this kind of death, however, is complicated by the resulting threat to basic needs. The risk of eventually losing everything looms continually for those who do not have

a viable fallback should joblessness extend beyond the reach of unemployment benefits. Give your friend a place to come for comfort, keeping in mind the realistic fears that accompany the sudden loss of an essential role in life. To keep from unintentionally adding to the stress, refrain from:

- *Pressuring.* “Have you registered with the unemployment office yet? How many applications did you file last week? How’s the job hunt going? Are you following up on leads?” The answers are probably “Yes,” “A lot,” “Not too well,” and “Of course I am.” [*Better to simply ask “How are you?” and more subtly convey your concern through eye contact and facial expression. Your friend can fill you in on the frustrating details of her job search if she feels like it.*]
- *Moralizing.* “Anyone who really wants to work can work. You should be willing to do a less important job, one you don’t necessarily like.” Overqualified applicants may not be hired for unskilled jobs because of potential problems (from the perspective of the employer) with management, salary, satisfaction, and stability. The middle aged compete for a limited number of entry level positions with fresh-faced college graduates, who are often more attractive because of their low health insurance costs if less so due to lack of experience. Employers, for the most part, have the luxury of choosing between many strong applicants—young, older and in between, and the long-term unemployed are often eliminated from consideration.

While losing a job within sight of retirement makes for a uniquely difficult circumstance, younger employees are commonly the last hired and the first to go when

a company scales back. Abandoning major goals when faced with job loss at the beginning of a career feels like an act of self-sabotage. The significant time and resources invested in training are a compelling reason to hold out for a decent offer, at least for a while. Steve, 27, earned a degree in industrial engineering. “I was in textiles,” he says. “My job was outsourced. When I first started to look for something else, I wanted to be selective. I didn’t want to stray away from my career path. But after seven, eight, nine months? I’ve had to branch out.”

- *Pollyanna-izing.* “It will all work out in the end—you’ll see. Things happen for a reason. Your next job will be the best one you’ve ever had.” This kind of optimism, perhaps defensible in theory, is unlikely to bring comfort in the immediate struggle with bills, credit card debt, or unmet family needs. It may be impossible to share another person’s faith that a devastating setback has the potential to benefit one’s career in the long run.
- *Minimizing.* “Millions of people are unemployed these days. Unemployment is nothing new. It’s still a widespread problem.”¹ [*Better to say: “There are so many smart, talented people in this terrible predicament. You aren’t alone. I know that doesn’t make it any easier for you.”*]
- *Teasing.* “You could always use your rejection letters to wallpaper the bathroom! I can help on my day off.” A good sense of humor is a powerful anecdote to stress. If you

1 See “Missing Workers: The Missing Part of the Unemployment Story.” *Economic Policy Institute* (updated January 9, 2015): www.epi.org/publication/missing-workers/.

can laugh about troubles, they seem less serious and more controllable. But this paradox is only true if the person grappling with a problem is the one finding the funny side of it. You can laugh *along with* a friend; you cannot make a joke at her expense without adding insult to injury. Sarah, 24, has been unable to find steady work after college and often faces insensitive comments. “I can’t believe how many of my friends tease me about not having a job and then say, ‘We’re just kidding; you know we love you!’ like that makes it okay,” she says. “There is nothing funny about trying to find whatever job you can get, whether you like anything about it or not. It’s scary.”

- *Rationalizing.* “You’re rich in the important things. You still have your health and beautiful children. What if you were miserable at home? I’d rather look for a job than deal with Betsy and Walter’s troubles. Their son is in drug rehab again. I heard it’s tearing their marriage apart.” While keeping things in proper perspective is a worthwhile defense against despair, people generally feel misunderstood, not encouraged, when their problems are downplayed.

It takes courage to be open with feelings of failure and rejection. The process of company downsizing can seem heartless—a impersonal reduction of “the base.” A long history of service and the expectations of loyalty that used to accompany hard work mean little when a company is forced to cut operating costs. Judith, a financial officer with access to classified files, was greeted one Monday morning by her supervisor and a security officer. To her shock, she was accompanied to her office and asked to clear her desk of personal items, in their

presence. Her keys were then confiscated and she was escorted from the building. In her late fifties, she suffered a heart attack that evening from the stress and almost died.

Insensitivity isn't always the case. Many employers feel terrible at having to eliminate positions, knowing what this loss will mean to the people they've let go. Empathy makes the blow gentler, but it's a harsh blow nonetheless.

Submitting applications in an overly competitive environment is, at best, an emotional roller coaster. Rejection letters sting and maybe even more, not being notified of a decision at all. When every job opening is met with a flood of qualified applicants, people go through successive interviews only to be turned down in the end, again and again: "I keep getting right to the last round of interviews," Steve says. "I was hired and given a start date once. Right before it, they called and said they'd lost a big account, and they had to fill the position internally. I've learned not to get my hopes up too high."

A friend can help by listening and responding in an emotionally supportive way, not with quips or quick advice. Try to reflect your friend's concerns and feelings. Here are a few examples:

Friend: I didn't see it coming. They closed my division, and everyone was laid off. I loved my job. I worked harder at it than anything I've ever done before."

You: I'd feel blindsided, too, especially with the effort you put into your work. [*Instead of: They had to have given some indication. Maybe you didn't see the signs. Was the first announcement buried at the bottom of a memo? You have to read every word.*]

Friend: I invested most of my savings in the business. I didn't expect it to fall apart so quickly. Now I don't have any income or savings.

You: It was a good decision at the time—you have a great idea. You couldn't have predicted the recession. Can I help you think through your options? [*Instead of: Maybe you should try to return your unused shipping boxes and strapping tape for a refund.*]

Friend: I've been unemployed for two years, and now it's winter again. I don't know where I'll find the money to pay my power bills. The thermostat is set on 65. I worry constantly about the kids.

You: Having young children makes it even harder for you. I wish I could help with the bills, but do the kids have plenty of warm clothes that fit? I know we could solve that one part of the problem.

Friend: I got another standard rejection letter today. I've sent out hundreds of applications. What am I doing wrong?

You: Nothing. You aren't doing anything wrong. It's not your fault.

“”

Hearing words that are meant to be comforting but aren't comforting, at least to me, is upsetting. I'm tired of easy-to-say cliches, like 'Don't worry. When a door closes, a window always opens.' People remind me to be grateful for what I have. Well, I am grateful for my health and my husband and my children, but the stress of unemployment impacts every single area of life. The paycheck from my part-time job goes straight into our health insurance premiums and loans. There's not a dollar left for paying other bills.

—Rebecca, 50

TWO. STAY IN CONTACT



WHEN YOU HAVEN'T HEARD FROM YOUR FRIEND for a while, get in touch. Keep it up on a regular basis: "Come have coffee with me. I'll treat now, and you can treat later. We don't have to talk about work if you don't want to." By reaching out, you'll be providing more than coffee. Social activity triggers an increase in the brain's supply of endorphins, otherwise known as pleasure hormones. Helping others does the same.

You may need to take the initiative for a while and weather a few rebuffs. Be sensitive to how your friend perceives the fact that you have a job, and he does not. Some people are better able than others to tolerate the feelings of discontent that may build when none of their friends share a particular misfortune. Misery loves the company of similar people in similar circumstances, hence the support groups that spring up around discrete hardships. Think of how uncomfortable it is to be the only person in an established circle of friends who must manage for an unspecified period without an income. The choice between sitting at home and being painfully confronted by the security your friends enjoy (in comparison to your lack of it) is a hard one to make. "I ended up distancing myself from my working friends," says Catherine, a designer whose firm closed. "Their lives seemed so perfect. It almost made me angry."

After losing a job, it can be a struggle to keep up socially and to respond appropriately when someone reaches out in sympathy. If you felt embarrassed over a downturn in your life, would you readily call a friend or relative who was aware of it and might give unwanted advice or ask questions?

Let your friend control how much he reveals of his situation. If you're out with others, don't bring up the subject of his unemployment, especially in a pressuring or frivolous tone. He'll talk about it if he wants to. The temptation to poke fun ("Ah, here's our favorite sofa spud, taking a break from his unplanned staycation!") may spring from deep-seated trust in a friend's capability: *He's such a brilliant, well-qualified person*, you may think, justifying such remarks, *that he has to believe in himself. I'm only trying to help him lighten up and push through*. Do recognize a friend's talent and potential but don't expect him, as unemployment drags on, to share your confidence.

The complexity of feelings brought about by unemployment can be confusing. It's hard to know what to say to a person wrestling with the prickly emotions of pride and resentment. But don't be put off; your friend needs you. These feelings, heightened by the fear of losing financial independence, can bring about serious depression.

My late husband took his own life after a heartbreaking and unexpected career upheaval that came on the heels of surgery for a brain tumor. While suicide has many contributing factors, the feelings of hopelessness brought on by such a loss—in his case the loss of his life's work—can be devastating.² For some, work and self are almost inseparable. Facing a dramatic, painful change with the help of people is always better, given our instinctive needs for social connection, than pulling away or being abandoned by friends who aren't sure what to say and do to help. Here are some suggestions to keep in mind:

² See Arthur Delaney, "Joblessness and Hopelessness: The Link Between Unemployment and Suicide." *Huffington Post* (June 25, 2012): www.huffingtonpost.com.

Acknowledge your uncertainty. Tell your friend how you feel, rather than guessing about how he feels: “It’s hard to see you this worried. I’m not sure what to say. If you want to talk things over, I’m here for you. If you’d rather not, I’ll just be here.”

Remind your friend that he is more than his job. “I admire you for many reasons beyond who you were at work. Your accomplishments there happened because of what you brought into it. You still have those qualities, whether you’re being paid for them or not. I respect and care for you the same as I always have. I’m grateful to be part of your life.”

Don’t assign fault. “Why didn’t you go talk to your supervisor when you first realized there was a problem? You might have been able to put things right, before it all fell apart.” If your friend could have done anything within reason to keep his job, he has already beaten himself up about it. Only hindsight is perfectly clear. Adding to regret and guilt only makes things harder.

Be specific about ways you can help. General offers (“Is there anything I can do? What do you need?”) result in doubt about what can freely be asked of you—a job, a loan, a place to stay, dinner now and then, a new interviewing suit, nothing at all? Unless you are confident you can follow through on whatever may be requested after such a sweeping overture, be explicit: “Things are tight for me now, too, but I can *[listen in confidence, go with you to a financial planner, pick up the tab on dinner for the next few months, check into what my company might have*

available, babysit while you interview, help you get set up online—offer whatever you feasibly can].”

By spelling it out, you spare your friend the dilemma of wondering how or whether to ask explicitly for help. Rebecca riskily changed jobs in midlife, and her promising new position was unexpectedly cut to half-time. In the aftermath, she struggled not only with scaling back her lifestyle but also with redefining her friendships. “People ask what they can do to help, so you tell them. Then they feel embarrassed when it’s something they don’t want to do,” she says. “You run the risk of exposing the limits of the friendship. It’s hurtful when you find out the relationship doesn’t go as far as you thought it did.” Many of her friends have drifted away during what has felt like an endless stint of underemployment. “People don’t know what to say. They want to make things better, but it’s better to accept that you can’t do too much about it.”

Help your friend save face. You might preempt your friend from asking for a loan or another form of substantial support you cannot give by stating at the start what you *can* do, as described above. But joblessness and financial stress bring on desperation, and desperation leads to rash plans and actions. His fears may override both his dignity and the risk of causing tension between the two of you. (A few points to consider when providing assistance are covered in section 6.) If your friend asks for cash and you can’t spare it, keep your answer brief, kind, and not encouraging of false hope. Don’t give a breezy, “Let me think about it. I’ll get back to you.” You may find it helpful to invoke another person’s input in softening a turn-down: “It must be agonizing for you to be in this position. I

can discuss it with my [*partner, sister-in-law, accountant, brother*], who has been advising me about my finances. I'm not in such great shape myself."

Understand that how you handle any distraught plea from a friend, especially one struggling with a sense of shame, will impact your relationship in the future. (Unfair, yes, since you did not cause the problem and aren't responsible for solving it. Emotions are not always subject to reason.) A face-saving, sympathetic answer, based regretfully on the limits of your own situation—not on a personal policy of never giving or lending money—will help him move on gracefully to other alternatives. This is not the time to explain your deeply held views on self-sufficiency or to quote Shakespeare.³ It would be more tactful to keep your answer free of any explanation by simply asking, "Is there another way I could help you?" You can gently repeat the question if necessary, perhaps suggesting something you are willing to do: "Can you think of another way I might be able to help? We could go over your expenses together and try to figure out what to do."

Avoid intrusive questions and quick solutions.

"How much money do you have left in savings?"

"Move in with Brandon's parents if you have to sell the house. They have extra room, don't they?"

"This is a super opportunity to reinvent your life! Try to enjoy the time off."

³ *Hamlet*, Act 1, Scene 3, Polonius: "Neither a borrower nor a lender be; For loan oft loses both itself and friend, And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry."

Reply to messages alerting you to needs. Imagine this email in your inbox, copied to 15 people: “Most of you know I lost my job a while back. Please contact me if you hear of any openings. I’ve been in pharmaceutical sales mainly, but I also have experience in advertising. My unemployment benefits have run out, and Lauren and I aren’t sure how we’ll manage for much longer.” No matter how busy you are, take the time to acknowledge such a message and indicate a willingness to network: “Roger, I can appreciate how worried you must be. I’ll ask around at work and let you know if anything sounds promising. I can also check at church and with the members of my softball team. Let me give this some thought. Can you send me your resume to pass along when I hear of an opportunity?” No response to a heartfelt message does, in fact, communicate, whether intentionally or not: It comes across as a brush off.

Be sympathetic to the effects of panic. Available time can be used for writing letters to prospective employers and scouting out opportunities, but only if your friend can suppress his anxiety long enough to focus and think clearly. Have you faced the choice of either moving in with a relative or being homeless, and can you imagine writing an upbeat, persuasive business letter while battling such fears? The self-confidence and optimism needed to inspire a positive response from a hiring manager (with a file of 200 competing applications) may be hard for your friend to muster. Most people have an idea of what to do when they’re in trouble but doing it while in a state of emotional turmoil is no small feat.

Willfully wasting time and being paralyzed by distress are two very different motivations for similar behaviors. “I

feel like I'm wearing a cold, wet, wool coat," Rebecca says, searching for a way to describe the experience of having her hours suddenly, drastically cut. Her analogy captures the experience of losing one's job in middle age, when the prospects for reemployment are limited. The skills needed to job search in this online world—marketing and self-promotion through LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Internet job websites, blogging, and other social media venues—may have to be learned by older applicants from the ground up. Rebecca is daunted by the challenge. "I feel immobilized. I don't know what to do," she continues grimly, "so I've found it hard to do anything. I have no energy for looking. I'm not a hot ticket on the job market, and I know it." Planning and counseling aside, a demoralized person in a wet coat needs warmth and comfort more than anything else.

Carry on. Don't let your friend's unemployment impact your investment of effort in the friendship. Lena, a mother of three whose husband was laid off, describes two very different experiences with her friends: "Our closest friends have treated us as though no change in our life has occurred. We still have dinner twice a month at one home or another, celebrate holidays together, speak regularly, and go out for coffee and dessert. But one couple distanced themselves after my husband lost his job. They had gone through a period of hard years themselves. We stood by them. After our circumstances changed and theirs began to turn around for the best, they no longer included us. It was as if the friendship had never existed. The feeling was one of loss and betrayal."

Keep abreast of other stressful changes in your friend's life. Lena's father died in the midst of her family's crisis. Her friends supplied meals, so she didn't have to worry about keeping her family fed while handling the details of his memorial service and estate. A friend whose finances and emotions are already stretched to the limits will appreciate freezable food and other forms of practical help more than flowers and cards. The need may be critical.

Be aware of how unemployment affects marriage and family relationships. You might be tempted, as mentioned previously, to try to cajole your friend into a better emotional place by pointing out how terrific his family is. But remember that you're not privy to what may be happening behind closed doors. While some couples and families pull closer to each other in times of trial, many are driven apart by the volatile emotions that tend to surface. You can help by not making assumptions. Here is an example of slowing down to listen:

You: At least you have Andy for support. He's a great guy. The two of you are so good together. And he's an engineer. His job must pay decently.

Friend: Andy—supportive? We got in a huge fight last night. I think the kids were scared. When he got home, I was asleep on the couch. I'm so tired lately. The dishes hadn't been done. He yelled at me, and I lost it. I said some terrible things I didn't mean. I can't seem to stop what's happening to us. I lost my job, and now we're about to lose our marriage over it. His job is okay, but we can't pay our bills with what he makes. We shouldn't have bought such

a big house that we can't sell now. He's up to his neck in our debts, but he covers for it by joking and acting like he doesn't care, mostly. It only makes me feel worse. I don't know what to do.

You: I'm sorry; I didn't realize. Were you able to calm down and talk things over later?

Friend: No, not really. It's tense between us, and everyone thinks we have the perfect marriage. We don't have a sex life anymore. What does that tell you about our marriage?

You: That you're way too stressed out? It's hard to be intimate when you're worried sick. [*Instead of: Sex isn't everything, you know.*]

Friend: What if Andy and I don't survive as a couple? I haven't worked in nine months. We can't make ends meet.

You: I do hear you. This is bad. I'm wondering if sleepiness during the day could be a sign of depression. [*Instead of: Look at the bright side. Things usually work out for the best. Everything will be all right.*]

Friend: What are you now, a psychologist? I don't know what's wrong with me; I don't mean to snap at you. I feel so cross. Andy and I aren't at the end yet. I'm not ready to pack my bags and give up on 21 years together. I couldn't, anyway. I can't afford to leave, and I'd never walk out on the children.

You: I'm always here to listen when you need to talk, and you can trust me to keep it private. The last thing you need to worry about now is other people's gossip. I was thinking

of having your family over for dinner once a week for a while, so you could get out of the house. Would that give you some relief?

“”

It was awful when my husband finally got a job and then lost it. I didn't think I could stand to go through the search again, and I wasn't even the one who was unemployed. We were desperate. We knew we couldn't live in the city on one salary. He was trying hard not to seem worried and to project a confident attitude. He didn't feel confident, though. Neither of us did, even though his job evaluations were always as high as they could get. It wasn't his fault. Jobs were not available.

—Karen, 28

I am more scared than I've ever been in my life. I try to stay positive, but I got a notice from the county saying if I don't pay my property taxes, my house will be put up for public auction. I have to choose between paying this one big bill and having lights and heat for the rest of the winter. I'm single. I don't have grown children who are working, or parents who are living, or any other relatives to speak of. There's no one I can ask for help.

—Melanie, 59

It was tough. I had just gotten married when my position was eliminated. The job was not there anymore. I found a job for a while, working by the hour as a bartender. I got home at three o'clock most mornings. I hardly saw my wife. We spent a lot of time groggily yelling at each other. My advice to friends is to tread gently and don't blame. It's hard not to be down on yourself and think "What am I lacking? What's wrong with me?"

—Brad, 33

THREE. ALLOW LEEWAY



IF YOU TEND TO BE SENSITIVE, deliberately give your friend extra emotional breathing room. If she seems easily angered or unresponsive to your needs, don't take it personally. Only assert boundaries in the face of real hurt or displaced aggression, but be compassionate. She's in a vulnerable, frightening place which is not likely to bring out her best side.

Most of us use recreational activities to relieve tension, and when we do, we're better able to avoid outbursts of temper around companions and loved ones. A good game of volleyball or tennis involves slamming an object around. Watching television allows a lapse into mindlessness. But this kind of free time becomes a burden, not a relief, during a period of unemployment. The pleasure of hobbies, sports, and other pastimes is diminished.

Connie, an adjunct professor whose class load was cut, says she can no longer enjoy reading and biking because she reprimands herself constantly. *You should not be doing this*, her inner voice scolds. *You should be working or looking for work*. "There is a constant, stressful focus on work," she explains. "I can't enjoy anything that used to be fun."

Tim, a retail buyer, unemployed after a store closing, agrees. He tried at first to fill every waking hour researching job openings, but he became frustrated by the sporadic nature of it. "The job openings seem to come in waves. I'll have three interviews in one week and then nothing for a month." His wife, trudging off every day to a job she does not like, is resentful, particularly when he tries to fight the boredom by hiking. "You aren't working!" she complains to him. "You've been

at home all day. What have you been doing that's productive? Why can't you at least make dinner?"

When daily life lacks the structure of work, with its definite beginning and ending points, keeping things in balance is a challenge. Add the disparity felt when one partner must unexpectedly assume the role of sole provider, and tempers can easily flare. A break from work due to unemployment is not, in most cases, even remotely pleasant—it's a period of almost intolerable uncertainty and worry.

“”

How did I get here? I have a ton of experience. I'm hard-working. I have a PhD—ten years of higher education. My wife only has a part-time job, and I have a part-time job, too, working at a bookstore. I can't get my mind off of worrying about how I'm going to take care of my family. I submit applications that go into a dark hole somewhere. I never hear anything back. The skills I have don't seem to be worth anything anymore.

—Richard, 46

FOUR. BE SENSITIVE IN CONVERSATION



A CLOSE FRIEND ONCE COMPLAINED TO ME about having her six-figure salary docked slightly to accommodate a new business partner. At the time I had resigned from a job to attend graduate school. With my savings invested in tuition, I faced a mountain of additional expense and no guarantee of work at the end of a five-year tunnel. More than two decades later, I remember the sense of gloom that washed over me as I stood in my tiny apartment and mumbled into the phone, “Oh, that’s dreadful. How will you ever cope?”

You may not be able to spare your unemployed friend completely from references to wealth and prosperity, but save chatting about topics that may drive him into silent anguish or envy (purchases of luxury items, the celebration of a promotion, expensive vacations) for time spent with people in your same economic position.

These days, unemployed baby boomers find themselves disconcertingly thrown in the same boat as their own children, looking for jobs after college. I interviewed a woman whose family lived for a period of months on the one salary of a child, recently graduated, who managed to find minimum-wage work as a sales clerk. Think of how upsetting it could have been for her during those tenuous months to have been stuck in a conversation with someone about their extravagant new kitchen renovation or trip to Hawaii.

A person who feels left out and lonely during the nine-to-five shift, day after day, may dismiss (understandably) a friend’s casual complaints about her boss, long hours, or office politics with an indignant “You don’t have any idea how lucky you are!”

Banning the subject of work altogether from conversation would be tedious, of course, since work is a main activity of life for most people. But be conscious of an unemployed friend's challenges and don't unthinkingly rub salt into a wound by carrying on as though his feelings, priorities, and resources have not changed. Imagine, for example, how an invitation to a work-related party might come across:

You: I'm beat. We've been working twelve hour days on the Bates proposal. I've had enough of drinking office coffee and eating takeout pizza. But we finally submitted it, and we're ready to celebrate. The whole team is going to happy hour at the King's Crown this evening. Do you want to join us? We've missed seeing you.

Friend: Hey, thanks, I appreciate it. But I've already made plans for the evening. [*While thinking: Right. Like I can really afford the cocktails and the cab home. I'd have to live on tomato soup the rest of the month. But my problems aren't his fault, and I guess I should be glad they haven't forgotten me.*]

You: I'll call you next time. By the way, how are you enjoying your sabbatical? I'd give anything for a day when I could sleep.

Friend: I wish it was a sabbatical. I'm worried about losing my house, and believe me, I don't sleep at night.

You shouldn't need to walk on eggshells or feel you must monitor your every word. "My close friends talk with me

about their jobs, as they would normally,” says Megan, a young woman starting a new business that is unprofitable at present. “I don’t want to think, ‘Oh, my gosh, people are scared to talk to me.’ I want them to talk about their work. It keeps me involved. But they don’t brag about promotions, or pay raises, or anything like that.”

Longstanding friends inevitably face periods when the relationship is out of kilter due to changes, both good and bad, within one person’s life. If such a change makes you feel uncomfortable, be open about it. You may need to make some adjustments, easy enough, to avoid accidentally hurting your friend’s feelings and to keep resentment from building. Here’s an example:

You: I feel selfish talking about my job around you. I know how you’re struggling, so it seems wrong.

Friend: It bothers me the most when people joke about my situation, or brag about what they’ve got, or complain about petty stuff—no more free donuts in the break room, having to park in the satellite lot, working late on Friday. I’m okay with hearing what’s going on for you. You seem to understand that I’m doing all I can to get out of this mess. Why don’t I tell you if I’m feeling worse than usual, so you can tone down the work talk?

You: That would help. And don’t ever think you’re being a burden when you need to vent. I don’t know how you handle not having a paycheck and being scared about the future. I can’t fix it, but I can listen.

“”

My friends tell me to be thankful I have a job. I work at a hotel, 32 hours a week. I can pay some of my bills, but I also have limited time to look for anything better. Finding a job is a job itself. I feel stuck and incredibly frustrated. I wonder how many of them would be thankful if they had to choose between clothes and electricity. They're making ten times the money I make, and they're doing the kind of work they trained for. The longer I go on with this job, the less likely I am to find what I want, but I can't afford to give it up.

—Will, 25

FIVE. HOLD CRITICISM, ADVISE WITH CAUTION



CRITICISM CAN BE HARD TO TAKE even when self-esteem is at a high point, much less when you've been knocked flat by adversity. Unless your friend asks for your advice, don't offer it, particularly in a way that communicates disapproval:

“Get out there and knock on those doors harder!”

“Don't stay in bed so late in the morning.”

“Wear brighter lipstick. You look tired. Can you get a professional haircut?”

Negativity and lack of initiative are symptomatic of clinical depression and insomnia, two incapacitating pitfalls (among many) of chronic stress. Stress can lead to a health crisis that makes productive work impossible. Instead of reprimanding a loved one for apathy, or glumness or sloppy clothing, be aware of the underlying conditions these signs may indicate. Say, “I'm worried about you. How are you holding up?” Then listen.

Unsolicited advice and disparaging observations seldom result in a hearty “Thanks! I hadn't even noticed the ten pounds I've gained eating fast food because it's cheap and filling.” Criticism is more apt to result in defensiveness than in gratitude and action. People want to believe they can solve their own problems and, as a rule, are aware of where and how they may be falling short in the effort.

Advice or a small push in the right direction are not wrong, should your friend directly request this of you. An objective opinion can be a useful reality check: “Don't be down on

yourself. You've got a lot to offer any company. Do you want to practice some of the harder questions they might ask in the interview?" But understand that a shoulder to cry on may be the main need at a given moment. What if your friend secures an interview about which she dares to be hopeful, arrives well-prepared, and is summarily dismissed? Tears wash away stress hormones, hence the saying "a good cry," and contribute to strength and resilience. A person in despair cannot respond readily to suggestions, beneficial and sensible or not. Be willing just to hear the pain and frustration. It will be enough.

Amy, 31, whose husband lost his job several weeks before their marriage, says she needed friends to listen to her feelings of discontent without criticizing him. As his unemployment dragged on for almost two years, forcing a move back to her parents' house, she became, justifiably, more and more upset. Nonetheless, she didn't want friends to side with her by putting her husband down. "I wanted them to listen and give comfort, not add to it by saying things like 'Can't he keep a job?' or make me feel like a bad person for being angry."

SIX. THINK THROUGH FINANCIAL OR HOUSING SUPPORT



OFFER FINANCIAL SUPPORT OR LIVING ARRANGEMENTS if you can—your generosity could be life-saving—but only if you are prepared to follow through. Don't volunteer in the spur of a sympathetic moment what you'll later withdraw or never mention again.

Unemployment creates material needs a friend can sometimes meet. The mortgage and utility bills can be paid; groceries and clothing can be bought. Whether a friend or relative feels secure enough to make such provisions or comfortable with how to broach the subject is another matter. When you have an excess of resources (wealth, an available apartment, a large house, an unexpected windfall of cash) it can seem natural for you to share. It can also seem reasonable for your friend to ask if you'd make a loan or permit the use of a spare bedroom. Give what you can, but do it with commitment and good judgment.

Realize a loan may never be paid back. Despite the best of intentions, your friend may not recover financially for many years. Lending to a friend or relative is more a means of sharing your assets than of making a nontraditional investment with low interest rates. Consider a “pay it forward” loan, in which the money is not reimbursed to you, but to another person in need whenever it becomes feasible. You'll set in motion a succession of kindnesses, and such an act has lasting intrinsic rewards.

State the terms of any cash you offer. If you're able to pay a bill only once, be frank in telling your friend: “Please consider

this a gift. I know you'd do the same for me. I can't afford to do more, but I'm glad to be able to help you this month."

Know that a temporary living situation may become more or less permanent, and it will require significant adjustments on everyone's part. Have a plan for when the arrangement will end and discuss alternative solutions should your friend's situation remain unresolved. Address in advance the sticky details:

Will you give your friend a set of keys?

Do you expect help with house or yard work?

Can your washing machine and dryer be used?

Are there separate areas in the house for talking on a cell phone (for instance, not in the family room)?

Can the thermostat be changed?

Does the water heater have an infinite supply of hot water?

Can you eat outside the kitchen area?

Are certain pieces of equipment or items off limits—your grandmother's china, the fragile cane-back chairs, your power tools?

Although hashing out minor issues may seem unnecessary and cause awkwardness between those involved in the discussion, moving in with another person or family for longer than a few weeks inevitably gives rise to flash points of disagreement.

A kindness shouldn't result in hard feelings. The higher aim, however, can get lost in the potentially irritating minutiae of daily living. You cannot accurately predict conflicts, but you can probably identify the key areas in which reaching agreement is prudent from the get-go. You might look at a few sample roommate contracts, readily available online, if only to guide your thinking.

Barring a serious breach of responsibility or a truly untenable state of affairs, stick to what you've agreed. A young couple, Sam and Karen, were promised the use of a relative's apartment rent free for the generous period of five years, only to have it taken back shortly after they had gotten settled. They were left scrambling, unable on the limited income they had between them, to find another apartment in the expensive city where they lived.

Monitor your own reactions. It's tempting for a benevolent friend to unthinkingly take on an attitude of mild superiority. A discrepancy of wealth or power, if not carefully handled, can sabotage a friendship: "Would you mind picking up my dry cleaning on your way over for dinner? You can charge it to my account." Or, "Listening to you makes me glad I'm tenured; I don't regret the choices I made." Or, "I've worked hundreds of hours of overtime. They can't afford to fire me." Many in the aftermath of the recession are at the mercy of forces beyond their control. The capacity to help is a blessing. You can enable your friend to accept your help by expressing in plain terms your own gratitude at being in a place to give it. No one is immune to misfortune. Success—toil, blood, sweat, late nights, bitten nails and sacrifice aside—comes only through the cooperation

of others and the confluence of favorable conditions. Remember that you could be in your friend's shoes.

“”

I went to a good school and made good grades. Now I can't find work that pays anything. How can I pay down college loans making less than ten dollars an hour? I can barely afford rent. My parents help me out. I'm torn between feeling grateful to them and feeling angry that it has turned out this way.

—Will

My friends try to help by giving me advice, but, honestly, I've tried everything they can think of suggesting and more. I finally asked them not to bring up the subject of work, unless they want to help me out in some practical way or have a job lead.

—Marsha, 38

SEVEN. MINIMIZE THE EXPENSE OF SOCIALIZING



FRIENDSHIP IS EXPENSIVE IN WESTERN CULTURES. Dinner at an upscale restaurant costs more than the average utility bill, and entertainment is the first sacrifice most people make when money is tight. While paying a friend's way is considerate, it feels awkward to be on the receiving end. As a matter of dignity, people in financial difficulty sometimes make up excuses not to go out rather than acknowledge that they cannot afford the cost. To voice openly such limits can be both embarrassing and isolating: No place in the budget for those extras may mean an end to the invitations.

An end to social invitations may, of course, be the least of an unemployed person's troubles. If the situation is grave, the ideas in this section and the next will seem frivolous. But remember *underemployed* Rebecca, from section 2? Her husband has a job, although not high-paying enough to cover expenses. They aren't desperate or homeless, but they are worried and lonely. Rebecca and her husband would be grateful if their friends adjusted some activities so they could take part without feeling strapped. Many people in this economy have been forced to accept part time or low wage work in order to work at all, and these people, living with much less than before the recession, are often not counted in statistics about job growth.⁴ Here some things you can do to include friends who cannot afford restaurants, movies, and bars:

⁴ See Tim Henderson, "Food Stamp Use Shows Continued 'Underemployment' Pain," *USA Today* (August 15, 2014).

Start a circle of friends who meet regularly in each other's homes once a month, instead of going out.

Socializing in different homes is relaxing and fun, and there are many ways to control the cost and trouble of it. A standing event involving the same group of people provides a built-in opportunity for socializing, which is beneficial in this hectic world no matter what your financial circumstances. Try one of these ideas:

- *A film discussion club:* Work your way through the list 100 Essential Films, by the National Society of Film Critics (www.filmsite.org). Rent or stream these movies and serve inexpensive popcorn. There are many rather amazing recipes to make it more special. Look for ideas on a cooking website such as www.foodnetwork.com (*50 Flavored Popcorn Recipes*) or www.rachelraymag.com (*Popcorn 10 Ways*).
- *A cooking club:* As an alternative to restaurants, divide the ingredients of recipes between friends who bring these ingredients, ready to cook, to your house. It's more economical to buy one ingredient than to make a whole dish for a potluck dinner. If you enjoy cooking, try complicated recipes. Cooking with friends at home is as much fun as going out for many of us. You can discretely assign a person with less to spend an affordable ingredient that takes more time to prepare.
- *A library book club:* Rather than selecting one book per meeting for the discussion, a book that must be purchased, each member borrows a different book from the public

library to read and share. An unemployed member could contribute minimally to refreshments or not at all: “We’re glad to have you in the group. You can chip in when you’re working again.”

- *A benevolence club:* Plan occasions when friends work together on items to donate to a worthy cause. Refinish a piece of furniture for a Habitat for Humanity ReStore⁵ if there is one in your area, make no-sew fleece blankets for shelter animals, refurbish old bicycles for a city youth program. Organize and box unused clothing, coats, and other items to donate to a community thrift shop.
- *A games-night club:* Games can include children and spare the cost of a sitter. Yahtzee, Apples to Apples, Survivor, Pictionary, and Catch Phrase are popular now. Watch NBC’s *Hollywood Game Night* for ideas of group games you can play at home. Cards Against Humanity is available as a free download. Or you can keep things even simpler. I once spent a memorable evening playing spoons (a card game variation of musical chairs) with a publisher and his 11-year-old daughter and her friends. Put away the iPads and eGames, and play a game of charades. Snacks for a game night are inexpensive: Enter “cheap easy snacks” into an Internet search engine, and you’ll get hundreds of ideas in a few seconds.
- *A cheeseparing gourmet club:* Invite friends to make one dinner a month on a challenging budget and contribute what

⁵ “ReStores” are nonprofit home improvement stores that sell new and gently used furniture and construction supplies. For more information: www.habitat.org.

you might have spent on a more expensive dinner to the community food bank or Stop Hunger Now.⁶ Determine an upper limit of money to be spent by each person participating, depending on the cost of living in your area. Establish a few guidelines: Can you “freely” use staples you have in the pantry, like olive oil and flour? Can you buy in bulk and calculate the percentage of the product used in the meal? Are drinks included? Provide mailing envelopes, pre-addressed and left at the door the night of the party. Contributions can be made privately (or not). By shopping carefully, I fed seven people the following menu for \$35.12, not counting the inexpensive wine brought by the guests: French bread rounds toasted with walnuts and pecorino cheese; fresh blueberries; grilled individual pizzas with homemade crust and a bar of vegetarian toppings; a salad with garden-grown greens, nasturtiums, and a simple dressing; and apple pie with whipped cream. I confess that I spent more time than usual shopping for groceries and picked the blueberries myself at a local berry farm, but I was quite gratified when I tallied the receipts and came in a few pennies over the five-dollar-per-person limit.

Look for free community events. Search the term “free events” in a city of any size, and chances are good you’ll find concerts, museums, lectures, fairs, and cultural activities. Churches and civic groups offer free speakers and lectures. Wineries offer inexpensive tastings, and gourmet stores host

⁶ Stop Hunger Now has distributed over 178 million meals to school children in 65 countries. I’ve participated in packaging events for Stop Hunger Now. Meals consist of soy protein, vitamins and spices, dehydrated vegetables, and white rice which can be easily reconstituted into soup. For more information: www.stophungernow.org.

free or almost-free cooking demonstrations and food samplings. Bars sometimes have small bands and dancing nights with no minimum purchase requirement or cover charge. Scout out these opportunities yourself and invite your friend.

Have a used book or clothing swap. Most people have books they've finished reading and decent clothing they no longer wear. Exchanging with friends is free and fun. Deliver any unclaimed items to Goodwill. White elephant parties are entertaining. Wrap enticingly one of those awful gifts you received in the past and promptly stuck in a closet: the cookbook of hotdog recipes, the tacky wall clock, the huge framed picture of someone else's baby. You can donate the items afterwards.

Do things outdoors. Go hiking, biking, or walking. Go berry picking. Watch thunderstorms. Fish in a public lake. Picnic at a park. The outdoors is free, and physical activity boosts mood, health, and mental alertness.

Go out for coffee, appetizers, or dessert. Pick up the tab for your friend. It's easier to imagine eventually reciprocating a smaller favor, like coffee. "I'd feel bad accepting dinner. That would be too much," says Megan, the woman starting her own business. "But I really appreciated it when a friend paid the cab fare for me once. It was only about five dollars, but I haven't forgotten. It meant a lot to me!"^{Text}

You'll notice that many of the suggestions in this section and the one following involve food. Groceries are expensive, but beyond the benefit of discreetly helping with this expense,

sharing meals and cooking together is one of the most comforting ways we connect with each other, no matter what the case.

“”

We miss the opportunity to socialize more than what we were doing before—than the actual thing we were spending money on. Spending time together is more important than spending money with people. We can't go to a bar or a restaurant. If we pay for a night out, we can't pay our rent. We get frustrated because we want to see our friends, but they have so much more money than we have. They don't want to grill burgers on a Saturday night. We understand not wanting to stay in every weekend, but maybe once a month? It would really help.

—Sam and Karen, late 20s

I'm at home while my friends are out in the world working. It's lonely. I stay home because I have to. I can't afford to go out.

—Will

EIGHT. HELP IN CREATIVE WAYS



LOSS OF INCOME TOUCHES EVERY AREA of life. Besides the mortgage and monthly deluge of bills, there are many less obvious sources of strain. You may be able to lighten one of these burdens:

Be generous with gifts. Think of practical gifts your friend needs. Birthday? Valentine’s Day? Give a basket or gift bag with an assortment of dried soup mixes, pasta and jarred sauce, or fruit. Tuck in something homemade and special to make it a true gift and not just foods bought from a store. Team up with friends on a prepaid credit card to use for a home repair or a visit to the dentist or eye doctor. Mail money equivalents anonymously, from “friends who care.” Many of us can manage to save each week on groceries by eliminating a specialty item, and several friends acting together could make a real difference during a period of need. The catch, when helping in this way, is to give without an expectation of *ever* being thanked or recognized. People can be torn between pride and dependency and might be humiliated to accept a gift of cash from friends. An anonymous gift card, on the other hand, is hard to refuse.

Provide no-cost options that allow your friend to participate in gift-giving occasions. Invitations to baby showers, birthdays, and similar occasions are uncomfortable to accept if you can’t afford to purchase the gift. Even if the host or hostess says there’s no need to bring one (a sensitive thing to do), it feels strange to be the only guest arriving empty handed. Here are a few ways to help:

- *“Buy” time from your friend:* “Will you go in with me on a gift for Anne’s baby shower? I’ll pay for it, if you can go pick it out and have it wrapped. I’d be grateful for your help.”
- *Plan a gift your friend can make:* “John’s birthday dinner is next week, and he loves your chocolate toffee. Could I get the ingredients for you to make it? We could give it to him from both of us.” When the chips are down, people may still have the trappings and equipment of a more prosperous time. A man who enjoyed woodworking probably kept his power tools. If you ordered the wood through a catalogue, the two of you could give unique gifts that would cost your friend nothing more than the effort.
- *Plan a job you can do together:* “I was thinking of detailing Mom and Dad’s car for their anniversary. I have the soap and wax. Do you want to work on it with me next Saturday?” Is your friend more successful in the kitchen than you are? Pair her skill with your groceries for the gift of a catered dinner you deliver together. Give a special casserole for the freezer. Everyone can use a fallback when there’s no time to cook. Purchase extra to double the recipe, and your friend will be able to stock her own freezer, too.
- *Invite your friend to partner with you on a gift involving a contribution to the Heifer Fund:*⁷ “I know Christmas is tight this year. Why don’t we buy a flock of geese and give one (figuratively

⁷ The Heifer Fund is a nonprofit organization that supplies animals, fish, trees, and plants to people in impoverished areas of the world to help them develop a self-sufficient, sustainable way of life. Contact information: [www.heifer.org/info@heifer.org/\(800\)422-0474](http://www.heifer.org/info@heifer.org/(800)422-0474).

speaking) to each of our cousins? We can download and print cards from the Heifer site and make homemade cookies. I'll send in the contribution for the geese and get the ingredients if you'll help me with the baking. I'm terrible at baking." A flock of poultry can be purchased from the Heifer fund for only about twenty dollars, and one egg-laying hen can literally save the life of a hungry child.

Grow a garden together. A medium sized, well-tended garden yields a surprising amount of food for the better part of three seasons, and the materials for a garden are relatively inexpensive. It's not unreasonable to expect hundreds of pounds and dollars worth of produce. A successful garden is a labor of repetitive digging, tugging, staking, weeding and debugging, tiresome tasks which can actually be enjoyable when done in the company of a friend. Live in the city? Container gardening on rooftops and balconies may be possible. If you do the garden tending in late afternoon, you can have your friend stay over afterward for dinner.

Provide dinners. Cook inexpensive dinners for your own family once a week or month and invite your friend and her family, without expecting to receive a return invitation. Many foods lend themselves to being shared because they're created in one big pot or baking dish, such as soups and stews, spaghetti and most other Italian foods, mac and cheese, and chicken casserole. It doesn't have to be typical dinner party fare, and your friend can help with the preparation and cleanup.

If she feels uneasy about eating with you so frequently, reassure her of the value of her intangible contributions: "We

truly enjoy your company. It's fun for us. It feels like a night out. I love having a friend with me in the kitchen, and the children are always excited to see Kate and Jason. We don't want to be invited back. We want to spend time with you. You're our friends!" Or try this approach: "I'm interested in learning to cook ethnic foods and could use some help. Would you come over and be my co-chef?"

Think of pets. A while back, I had a constantly hungry but slightly overweight dog. A friend suggested making the mainstay of my dog's diet unprocessed foods of cooked meat and vegetables. She began to save leftovers of these foods in a large plastic bag she kept in her freezer. I'd pick up the scraps every couple of weeks and stew them down with a small amount of oatmeal or brown rice⁸ for my grateful dog, who lost weight, grew a shiny coat, and quit begging. My friend appreciated the arrangement because it assuaged her guilt at grinding up usable food in the garbage disposal. A few people keeping freezer doggie bags could lighten the expense of a pet, and we badly need our companion animals during times of stress.

Despite stern finger-wagging on the part of experts against the practice of feeding scraps, I wonder which would be better for a pet: the cheapest commercial food—perhaps laden with corn, scary protein sources, and a slew of chemical additives—or *suitable* leftovers from a family's food as a supplement to prepared pet foods? Would the pet be better off relinquished to an animal shelter (and possibly euthanized), sometimes the only

4 Rice must be fully cooked or it can cause bloat, a serious health risk. Also, if scraps are mixed with dry dog food, give only what the pet will eat immediately. Dry dog food has surface bacteria that can quickly multiply if the food stays wet.

choice when the owner can no longer afford to feed it, or being abandoned to fend for itself?⁹ Ask the advice of a veterinarian or research foods to avoid¹⁰ and determine the proper balance of ingredients. Dogs and cats require a protein-based diet, and like people, they have specific vitamin and mineral needs. Certain foods, spices, seasonings, and sweeteners are toxic to pets and must be avoided completely. Throw away bones, big and small. They can splinter in the digestive tract and cause a fatal injury.

If your friend is forced to move and unable to take his pet with him, consider providing a foster home for the pet until he secures a place to live where he can keep it again. Imagine the heartbreak of turning a beloved cat or dog over to an animal shelter without knowing the outcome. Animals suffer, too, when their owners fall on hard times.

BESIDES THE IDEAS MENTIONED ABOVE, look at your friend's lifestyle and see if there are other ways you can intervene. My friends and I give each other clothing we're not wearing for one reason or another. We trade skills and share equipment. There are many indirect means of helping, and the act of doing so, even if it does not meet a vital need, will communicate hope and concern.

⁹ See Kari Huus, "In Recession, Pets Go Homeless in Droves" *MSNBC* (November 24, 2009): www.msnbc.com.

¹⁰ Both the ASPCA and the Humane Society have online lists of human foods which are harmful to pets.

“”

My husband and I have lost friends because of our financial problems. We see people around town; we're still friends but not in the same way. It's disappointing. I read an article on Emerson's essay on self-reliance. It said the concept has ruined our society. We are all so self-reliant, and yet we need the networks of people, the sense of community and interdependence.

—Rebecca

Try to see it from our perspective. We don't have any money to spend on extras. We'd appreciate it if our friends could figure out ways to keep the cost down so we wouldn't feel so left out. We don't always want to be the ones suggesting things because they're cheap or because they're free.

—Sam and Karen

NINE. PROVIDE WORK OPPORTUNITIES



ASK DIPLOMATICALLY IF YOUR FRIEND would be willing to work within her social group. You might consider sending an email to avoid putting her on the spot: “Sometimes I have odd jobs or need help with the type of work you did before. Should I call you? Would you be okay accepting payment?” Be alert to ruffling your friend’s pride, and let go of the idea if it falls flat: “I’m not sure how I’d feel working for a friend, either. Tell me if you change your mind.” [*Instead of: “You’re short on cash, right? I’m only offering you a way to make some. Don’t get annoyed with me.”*]

When you need help with tasks that make use of your friend’s professional skills (or, for example, with de-cluttering, garage or workshop organizing, gardening, painting, moving, building, house-sitting, caregiving) give her the right of first refusal: “I’m putting in some plants next weekend and thought you might like to help. I could find someone else, but I’d rather have your company.” Be explicit about how much you can pay: “I’ve checked into the going rate for this kind of work. It’s \$150 a day.”

It’s always better to be working alongside your friend if you’re around. Jenna, a single woman in her early thirties, pulling together part-time jobs to make ends meet, was asked by an acquaintance to babysit while others attended a party. She liked and admired the person giving the party and would have welcomed a chance to connect more deeply with her. The request was prefaced with a friendly, “What are you doing Saturday night?” Jenna’s initial delight changed to hurt and embarrassment when she realized she was not being invited to join the

others. Remember the Golden Rule, and don't suggest a job that might make a friend feel devalued or unappreciated.

“”

A friend offered me a job a while back, and I was grateful. I would have done anything at that point. I wish I could trade skills with someone, though. They'd help me with my resume, and I'd help them clean out a garden or whatever seems like too big a task to do alone. Then at least we'd be able to spend time together.

—Rebecca

Friends from my old agency are always asking me about their problems and cases. They treat me like a free private consultant. If the agency needs my expertise so badly, they can rehire me.

—Laura, 48

TEN. PROMOTE THE JOB SEARCH



LAST AND MOST IMPORTANT, keep your ear to the ground. Timing is everything. A working friend may hear of openings and opportunities before they become public. A large percentage of jobs are never advertised. They're filled by word of mouth. Here are some ways you might be able to help with the search:

Polish resumes and letters. Editing your own work is like trying to spot a few acquaintances in a crowded stadium where everyone is dressed in black. Mistakes are somehow less evident to the person who made them than they are to a more objective reader. Even so, when asked to give your opinion of a friend's writing, keep things positive. Reassurance may be more important than any other feedback you provide, since unemployment can cause a short-sighted focus on flaws, mistakes, and weak points. Trying to dust off and beef up a resume in the face of fierce competition is difficult, especially when it's something you never expected to have to do. If he is open to it, brainstorm with your friend to make a list of his personal and job-related strengths.

The paper resume, to the chagrin of older applicants, is gradually going the way of the electric typewriter as employers increasingly rely upon a person's web presence to gain a better sense of who they are. Help him clean up his appearance on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and other top sites. Job applications are often handled over the Internet, and digital resumes require careful formatting. The technology and sheer number of social media outlets can be daunting if you have been out

of the job market for a period of years. A savvy friend would be a lifesaver to a person struggling in a fog of inexperience to navigate the ins-and-outs of an Internet-based job search.

Help with the design of a resume business card containing contact information and a list of active social media accounts on the front side, and a 50-word summary of qualifications on the back. Do this in both electronic and paper formats. Electronic cards are convenient and can be used with a job search app, like CardDrop. Traditional business cards, though, remain a long-established networking tool and may provide a refreshing departure from sending materials to an already swamped email inbox. Most people are still in the practice of handing out and keeping up with business cards. They would be easy for friends to carry, too: “I know someone who’d fit that position perfectly. Let me give you a card with his information. Here’s a rundown of his experience on the back. Can I put him in touch with you?”

For example, this is a business-card resume I could produce, with my information condensed to less than 50 words:

Author	Professional writer with experience in
Freelance Writer/Essayist	administration, consulting, program develop-
Counselor	ment and coordination, urban educa-
Lecturer/Educator	tion, and event planning. Have created an
	original book series, reviewed textbooks
	for publication, and taught graduate level
	psychology. Writing portfolio on request.

Coach your friend on his elevator pitch. An elevator pitch is a person’s best selling points spoken confidently in the time it takes to ride an elevator, which is about the

length of a crucial 30-second first impression. Anyone who has ever tried to formulate an elevator pitch knows how difficult it is, and not just to come up with the right words. The nonverbal message—eye contact, posture, tone of voice—is equally important. Help your friend craft and practice a positive pitch that highlights his competencies and downplays the problem of his unemployment: “My company restructured, and it wasn’t a good fit for me going forward. I’m a mechanical engineer with ten years of experience in construction management. I supervised the North Woods Road project.”

Share relevant news of career expos and recruiting events. Find out the time, location, and sponsor. If you have inside information about an upcoming job opening, tell your friend about it, and try to put in a good word for him.

Provide the names of contacts. Many of us have a wide social network. Is there a business introduction you could make? A name you could provide? Do you have connections through social media venues that might be helpful? “All of my friends know about my situation. I’ve been very open about what I’m looking for and what I can do in the way of short-term jobs,” explains Megan, the woman mentioned earlier, who has managed for many months on temporary work while starting a business. “All of the jobs I’ve gotten have been through friends who passed on information to me. They keep me in mind as they’re going through the day. I have a whole private network of people looking for roles I can fill. It’s a good feeling.”

CLOSING THOUGHTS

IN A FEW WORDS, be the kind of friend you would want if you were between jobs. Helping a friend feel better could play a big part in making a painful stint of unemployment more bearable. Here's a story to keep in mind.

My Aunt Rachel owned a floristry for many decades. It was a nondescript shop in a strip mall. Petals, fern leaves, and bits of ribbon lay scattered on a cold concrete floor, and the air was heavy with the odd smell of cut, refrigerated flowers. A man walked in late one afternoon. He approached my aunt at the counter, where she stood by an old-fashioned cash register and a shelf of whimsical vases. "I'm looking for a job," he mumbled. One could only imagine from his demeanor that my aunt's shop was at the tail end of a long and luckless trek around town. He seemed already to be bracing himself for a rejection. Aunt Rachel waited for him to look at her.

"What can you do?"

"Nothing." He shook his head, as though admitting a bleak, unalterable fact.

"Well, can you drive?" she asked, and the slightest flicker of hope crossed his face.

"Yes, I can drive."

"Are you friendly with people?"

"Yes, I'm friendly."

"Can you write down orders?" My aunt continued until the man had affirmed a list of skills. "I don't have anything at the moment," she admitted, "but let me have your name and number, and I'll call you when I do."

The man who left was still unemployed, but he was different. He was brighter, not so defeated; he had a slight spring in his step. If my aunt could, in less than five minutes, make such a difference to a discouraged stranger, think of what you can do through compassion, companionship, and practical help for a friend.



Mary McDaniel Cail, Ph.D. began The All-Weather Friend series as a result of having faced a number of life-changing losses, including the tragic death of her husband. Mary received her doctoral degree in Counselor Education and Supervision from the University of Virginia. She has worked as a writer, counselor, consultant, and educator. Her work has been



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