

By Amanda Visser

How to beat the unemployment blues

We live in volatile times, and uncertainty extends to all aspects of our lives. What steps do you need to follow to ensure that you are prepared for career upheaval?

most people strive to be happy or to experience a feeling of well-being. Normally that level of happiness drops because of some traumatic experience such as divorce, sickness, death of a family member or unemployment.

According to Kerstin Jatho, one of eight qualified positive psychology life coaches in South Africa, people's happiness levels recover and return to normal after they've gone through such events, the exception being unemployment.

"You very seldom manage to get back to your original level of well-being after being unemployed, especially if it has been for a long period," she says.

According to Statistics South Africa's latest *Quarterly Employment Survey*, the expanded unemployment rate during the first quarter of this year was 36.4%. This means officially 6.2m people are unemployed.

Jatho says unemployment has nothing to do with a person's self-worth. However, the person loses trust in society and may never regain that trust.

Louis Meijer, executive and business coach at Change Partners, describes himself as an engineer by training, a project manager by profession, and an executive coach by design and passion.

He is no stranger to unemployment – a few years ago, the company where he was managing director was restructured down and its entire staff contingent was retrenched.

When you have been in a position of leadership in a company where people looked to you for decision-making and support, you feel without direction when suddenly all that is gone. "It becomes lonely. All the support, of having to go to work and being around people is gone," says Meijer.

According to Jatho the most natural thing for people who lose their jobs is to withdraw from all relationships. This causes loneliness which is very dangerous psychologically, she warns.

"Giving up is easy, and a very quick way to a downward spiral. They need to be assured that



unemployment. It is nothing shameful," Jatho explains.

Emotional experience

Meijer says the way you experience unemployment largely depends on what you do with all the free time you now have. He read everything he could lay his hands on. He also had lots of coffee with lots of people in lots of coffee shops.

He says that one of the books he read gave a long list of things you should do when you lose your job. What struck him was that looking for a job was not amongst the top 10 bullet points.

"That was very enlightening. The advice was more about how to relieve anxiety, like taking up a hobby, or doing voluntary work. They recommend you get involved in all sorts of activities besides finding work."

The family members of the unemployed person should realise this and not add to the anxiety by pushing too much. This allows the person to keep on exploring.

Meijer spent months exploring possibilities. However, it is important for people to reflect on how long they can survive before "hitting the economic wall".

An associate of Meijer's, who started his own business, determined that he could last at least six months with no income while developing the business before he would hit that wall. He decided that he would not be worried during that time.

"You cannot fret every day. Whatever number you come up with, work hard at not fretting during that period. The more you fret, the less chance you have of getting yourself together again."

If you do go for interviews, your stress levels or apprehension and even desperation will show. People will sense this. "That is the last thing you want to project when you are going for interviews," he says.

Regaining confidence

To rebuild confidence or remain confident is quite challenging, because it is a component of feeling competent. Unemployed people often

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