

# The Five O'Clock News<sup>®</sup>

from America's Premier Career-Coaching and Outplacement Service

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*"One organization with a long record of success in helping people find jobs is The Five O'Clock Club."*

**FORTUNE**



**A REPORT FROM OUR COACHES**

## Powering Through the Emotional Roller Coaster: 10 Ways to Confront Job-Search Stress

**by David Madison, Ph.D.**

**Director of the National Guild of Five O'Clock Club Career Coaches**

The following article is based on a panel presentation as part of the ongoing training of Five O'Clock Club coaches in New York. The panelists were Bill Belknap, Renée Lee Rosenberg and Mary Anne Walsh. Bill and Renée lead weekly Five O'Clock Club groups by telephone (our Insider program), and Renée also coaches a group at a physical branch of the Club in Manhattan.

“In this world,” Ben Franklin wrote in 1789, “nothing is certain but death and taxes.” That was *before* the invention of the *income tax*—the government's practice of grabbing part of everybody's paycheck!

But in our far more complex world 220 years later, most



**Bill Belknap**

**Renée Lee Rosenberg**

**Mary Anne Walsh**



Great American Scream Machine, copyright 1999, Joel Rogers

people are probably aware of another inevitability: *occasional job loss* has also been programmed into our lives. Death we owe to the Creator, for taxes we can blame the government, and *occasional job loss* seems to be a byproduct of the modern global economy. Job churn has been a relatively recent development; even a couple of generations ago, people were accustomed to remaining with an employer for two or three decades, or more. Today, of course, most Americans stay in their jobs, on average, for only about four-and-a-half years.

In fact, college graduates in 2004 can anticipate having *four careers*, and perhaps as many as a *dozen* jobs during their lifetimes. In other words, everybody had better get used to

**Also in this issue**

- ◆ **Choosing the Right Career**
- ◆ **An Attitude for Success: "Go Hard or Go Home"**

being unemployed—for a few weeks, a few months?—every four or five years.

*Get used to it?* Anyone who has been through unemployment will tell you that *getting used to it* is not likely to happen. In fact, there are few experiences in modern life that are more stressful than losing a job, even if the job wasn't a very good one. We can name at least six sources of this stress—do any of these sound familiar to you?

### 1. The Loss of Income

Few Americans are probably ready for the paycheck to stop, *i.e.*, there's not a lot in the bank for a rainy day. There may be a reserve to cover a few weeks or months, but getting along from paycheck to paycheck is the reality for millions of wage-earners. Severance and unemployment may ease the burden for many, but when the paycheck has stopped, *the end is in sight*: we can look at the calendar and see when severance and unemployment will run out.

Add to this stress the ugly truth about consumer credit card debt, now at record levels. All too often, people who are out of work can pay only the monthly minimums—and watch late-fees and interest charges pile up.

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**When you don't have a job, "What kind of work do you do?" becomes a dreaded question. You answer, "I'm between jobs," is absolutely the truth regardless of how you feel.**

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### 2. The Loss of Self-Esteem

When you have a job it's easy to tell the world what you do: "I'm a divisional controller at Roland Chemicals," "I'm an administrator at St. Matthew's Hospital," or "I'm a marketing manager at Southworth Paper." But when you don't have a job, "So what do you do?" becomes a dreaded question. We resort to a euphemism, "I'm between jobs." Somehow it's very hard to muster the

words, "I'm unemployed"—because these words seem to carry the meaning that (or so we're afraid): "I'm damaged." We probably over-identify *what we do with who we are*—because we tend to devote so many waking hours to the job. Hence, the core of our being—dipping into philosophical terms—becomes vulnerable when we're out of a job. Ironically, the problem for many folks is that they don't really believe they're *between jobs*—which is absolutely the truth. More about that later.

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**After many years of catching the 7:35 train and putting in eight- to ten-hour days, the lack of routine can be disorienting.**

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### 3. The Loss of Friends and Colleagues

Of course, people don't stop being friends with people they used to work with. But now the *daily* camaraderie is gone. "Let's get together for drinks one of these days," is now the reality instead of seeing Mark or Helen at the next desk every day—and sharing news of daily life, as well as of the work to be done. If co-workers have been a part of the daily routine for several years—and have become friends—we can, in fact, speak of the *grieving process* as people are removed from such an environment. For many people, a painful part of not getting up and going to work every day is missing those people who were fun to be around.

### 4. Envy and Resentment

In some cases, part of job-search stress can be traced to the knowledge that life at your old office goes on without you. You may have been one of five, six or 10 people cut from payroll, but 30 people are still there. Maybe some of your favorite people are still there—and some of the people you know aren't especially competent. If it were not for some arbitrary executive or budgetary decision beyond your control, you

would still be there. Why me?

### 5. The Fracturing of Routine

After a few weeks of unemployment, one outplacement client commented recently to her Five O'Clock Club coach, "I am in a dream, and I know I'm going to wake up and be back in my office." After many years of catching the 7:35 train and putting in eight- to ten-hour days, the lack of routine can be disorienting.

As much as we wish we could sleep late more often, as much as we welcome three or four day holiday weekends, our lives *are* structured around work schedules, whether it's nine-to-five or some other shift. When people are robbed of such routines, they can feel that they've been cut loose. Their comfort zone has been destroyed, and they can feel that they've lost control over their lives.

This is similar to the uprootedness that retirees feel if they don't know what to do with all of the "empty" hours and days. Even if an unemployed person knows that there are things to be done to find a job—such as scanning the want ads and sending out résumés—the lack of structure (*i.e.*, not having to catch the 7:35 train) can be debilitating. Aimlessness sets in and people may park on the couch for days or weeks. It's not that they're lazy...it's more a matter of shell shock.

### 6. The Impatience of Family and Friends

Those around you are stressed, as well. They're not accustomed to having you around the *house*—*their* routines are disrupted, too. Spouses and offspring are worried as they see the strain on the family finances, and perhaps even resentful as lifestyles are trimmed to conserve resources. They're not used to dealing with the breadwinner's drastic morale swings when a job hunt drags on and on, with hopes raised and dashed.

It may not be said in so many words, but the message soon becomes, *snap out of it*. And the impatience is often accompanied by mindless advice that damages morale even more: "Look

at all those ads in the newspaper—haven't you sent your résumé yet?," or "Why not try handing out your résumé at the train station?"

**You've got to feel better in order to get off the couch and do the work required to find a job.**

### Getting Over, Around or Through the First Brick Wall

The first major Five O'Clock Club book (1992) was called *Through the Brick Wall: How to Job-Hunt in a Tight Market*. The topic was overcoming the odds in a difficult job market, and the primary question posed was: "How much do you really want that job—are you prepared to go through a brick wall to get it?" The book outlined smart job-hunt techniques to outclass the competition and get the prize.

But the six factors listed above tell us that there is often *another* brick wall that people sometimes need to get through before an effective job search can begin. Whether we call it stress, depression or bad morale, that's the

first brick wall. "I'm not in the *mood* to job search," can be a major hurdle.

**Regular physical exercise helps to reduce tension and stress; a half-hour walk every day is the way to do it on a budget.**

Of course, you've got to *snap out of it*. But how? Obviously there's a big difference between situational and clinical depression. In the case of the latter, a person should be under medical care and on medication—these are the first steps to getting better and regaining control of one's life and destiny. But situational depression means, as we sometimes say at the Five O'Clock Club, "You'll feel better when you have a job." However, you've got to feel better in order to get off the couch and do the work required to find a job.

Here are a few suggestions for *powering through the emotional roller coaster*.

#### 1. Job-Search Is a Transition: Keep It in Perspective

Don't believe the negative inner voice that may tell you, in your darkest moments, "I'll never get a good job again." When you tell people, "I'm



"You've been working hard for us, Freedwell, and you deserve some time off. Take an extra 10 minutes at lunch today."

## The Job-Search Buddy System

**D**o you wish you had someone to talk to—fairly often and informally—about the little things?



"Here's what I'm planning to do today in my search? What are *you* planning to do? Let's talk tomorrow to make sure we've done it." You and your job-search buddy could keep each other positive and on track, and encourage each other to do what you told the small group you were going to do: Make that call, send out those letters, write that follow-up proposal, focus on the most important things that should be done—rather than (for example) spending endless hours responding to job postings on the Web.

With your buddy, practice your Two-Minute Pitch, get ready for interviews, bounce ideas off each other. Some job-search buddies talk every day. Some talk a few times a week. Most of the conversation is by phone and e-mail.

Sometimes, people match themselves up as buddies. Just pick someone you get along with in your small group. Sometimes, your coach can match you up. However you do it, stay away from negative people who talk about how bad it is out there. They will drag you down.

The small group changes over time: people get jobs; new people come in. If you lose one buddy who got a job, get another buddy.

Your buddy does not have to be in your field or industry. In fact, being in the same field or industry could keep you focused on the industry rather than on the *process*. But you *do* have to get along! The relationship may last only a month or two, or go on for years. Some buddies become friends.

Of course, you should see your Five O'Clock Club career coach *privately* for résumé review, target development, salary negotiation, and job interview follow-up. It's usually best to get professional coaching advice for these areas. ●

between jobs,” you assume that *they* believe you. Believe it yourself. Even if you’ve just been turned down for three jobs—a day like that can plunge *anyone* into self-doubt—remind yourself that you *got* three interviews and you can get three more (if you’re working The Five O’Clock Club method, you probably already *have* three more or know how to get them).

One of the most memorable sermons preached by Harry Emerson Fosdick, founder of Riverside Church in New York in the 1920s, was on the topic, “When You’re at the End of Your Rope.” One of his main points was that you’ve probably got a lot more rope left. Whether you believe it or not, you’re not really at the end of it at all.

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### Being freed from the nine-to-five grind, including catching the 7:35 train, means you have time to take stock.

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## 2. Despite the Worries, Being in Transition Can Have a Plus Side

Being freed from the nine-to-five



*“Thanks for the ‘Good luck on your new job search’ card. But I wasn’t aware I was looking for a new job.”*

grind, including catching the 7:35 train every morning, means you have time to take stock. Many people realize that they have been charging ahead so intensely, so relentlessly for so many years that they haven’t noticed they’ve been off course. Or they’ve been putting up with demands and environments that drag them down.

Unemployment can be a time to think and plot course corrections. Some of the questions to be considered as you claim R & R time and test the job market:

- ♦ What matters to me the most?
- ♦ What do I want to do differently?
- ♦ What *hasn’t* worked for me in the past? (That is, dissatisfiers I’ve put up with.)
- ♦ What was my own role (if any) in my job loss? What can I do better the next time?
- ♦ How am I taking care of myself? Serious deliberation of these questions can be liberating and energizing.

## 3. If You Need to Vent, Vent!

If you’re angry, frustrated, feeling betrayed—whatever—find people to talk to about what has happened.

There’s only so much your family wants to hear, so find a support group. “Getting it all out” *does* have healing power, and there is nothing especially heroic or brave about trying to go it alone. It will take only a little snooping on the Internet or in your local newspapers to find support groups at houses of worship, libraries and community centers. You’ll find people who will listen, and whose stories will help you to feel less isolated. The weekly job-search strategy groups at The Five O’Clock Club serve

another purpose altogether—for that, see the last point, Number 10.

## 4. But...Surround Yourself with Positive People and Things!

Obviously, circumstances differ greatly, but job loss can mean that you’re far more fragile and vulnerable than you realize. The stress and uncertainty of the situation impact your response to the world—as we’ve often said, job hunters lose wallets and walk into walls. So it’s especially important to *manipulate your environment in your favor* as much as possible. Make *protecting your morale* a daily obsession:

- ♦ Avoid toxic people—the naysayers, pessimists and cynics. Some job hunters have told us they shun some of their friends who turn out to be too negative. Associate with people who tend to see that the glass is half full. *Stop* going to a support group if there is too much venting and negativity.

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## Don’t read negative stories in the press having to do with employment. Negative stories sell. They’ll rarely tell you about the employers who are hiring 2,000 people.

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- ♦ There’s no law that says you *must* watch the local news. Even if it’s been a life-long habit, ask yourself why it’s necessary to hear every night about babies that fell out of windows, little old ladies who got run over by cats, or the serial rapist who’s still on the loose. You know that bad things happen to good people—what’s the point of being reminded when you’re emotionally vulnerable?
- ♦ If you see headlines, “Jobless Rate Hits Six-Month High,” or “Ace Electronics Announces 2,000 Jobs to Be Cut,” *don’t* read the articles. They’ll get you down, and chances are, they have nothing to do with *your* situation or *your* job search. You can be sure the article will not point out that Ace Electronics hired five people last week.
- ♦ While it’s important to have fun

(more about that later), so protect yourself in this respect, as well. Going to the movies is a great idea, but don't watch depressing movies. If you see that *Revolutionary Road*, or *The Hours* are on cable, pick something else. Not that you should stick with the Disney Channel, but pay attention to input. Now is not the time to get a full dose of reality about the dark side of human nature. Treat yourself to *Up*, or *The Proposal*, even if you've seen them before.

**Avoid toxic people—the naysayers, pessimists and cynics. Associate with people who see the glass as half full.**

#### **5. Accept that the Emotional Roller Coaster is Part of Job-Search—and Life!**

There's no use kidding yourself—you will have bad days. Just don't fall into the trap of believing that the bad days are the norm. The real world will hand you the good days as well, and you should do your part to make them happen. Remember that you had good days and bad days when you were on the job!

The ups and downs aren't part of life just when you're unemployed. One of our coaches who leads groups reports that, according to one survey, the number-one thing that gets people down is *un-returned phone calls*. But keep in mind that persistence does pay off (*i.e.*, it takes an average of eight follow-up phone calls to reach people)—and the payoff means that morale swings up again. Make *more* phone calls. That's part of the process.

And morale, in fact, can get a big boost when your phone calls put you in touch with people who are eager to be helpful—they welcome you to come in for a networking meeting, refer you on to other people, or simply take a few minutes to give you pointers and suggestions. Many Five O'Clock Clubbers have reported on how *nice*

people have turned out to be.

**Think of getting hired again as a business problem. You've rarely been stumped before. Why now?**

#### **6. Look at Your Unemployment as a Business Problem**

When you had the bad days at work, you analyzed the problem, marshaled resources and people, and came up with solutions. In the wake of job loss, your emotions—your hurt or anger—may be blocking this kind of response. But think of getting hired again as a business problem—you've rarely been stumped before, why now? Obviously, you may need to master some new skills, especially if it's been a long time since you've been in the job market. But The Five O'Clock Club methodology is not rocket science. Once you have the tools, job-hunt can be treated as a business problem: tracking down the people who are in a position to hire you, positioning yourself appropriately, offering proposals to meet their needs, and turning interviews into offers.

#### **7. Try to Get Short-Term Successes**

Break this business problem down into manageable components. When you get up in the morning, don't say to yourself, "I'm looking for a job again today." Rather, have a realistic agenda for *that day*, things that can be accomplished in a day: write five more targeted letters, identify ten more companies to contact, make ten follow-up phone calls, get one or two networking meetings set up. Some of the activities will pay off—you land a meeting, or you get suggestions on good companies and people to contact. These are the short-term successes and they feed good morale. Many people have found that one of

best short-term successes is retooling the résumé after finishing the Seven Stories Exercise. Their old résumé was a boring recitation of past job descriptions, and it can be very invigorating to see one's strong points and accomplishments stated brilliantly at the top of the résumé: "Gee, I didn't realize that I was this good." This creates confidence and energy for moving forward.

#### **8. Keep on Top of Your Game**

So you don't go to the office from nine to five like you used to, but that's no excuse to let your skills and knowledge slip. You always want to be perceived as a valuable commodity. You always want to sound current and sharp when you interview. Use some of your time now to catch up on reading journals and attending meetings of your professional associations. You may feel a little awkward showing up and saying you're between jobs, but rubbing shoulders with the people in your field helps you to feel you're still part of the scene.

And of course, you're there to network, too. This would be a good time to volunteer for one of the association committees—this helps people to see that you're still in the thick of things, at the top of your game. The fact that you're between jobs becomes irrelevant. Volunteer in other contexts as well, even if it means helping a friend in his/her business. That experience can go on your résumé as well—nobody is going to ask if you got to paid to do it.

This might also be the time to take a course, one that you could never find the time for when you were employed. This could be a great selling point on your next few interviews. Or you could



teach a course, which obviously makes you look more valuable.

Temping or consulting is also a way to stay current. It brings in cash, keeps you focused and calm, can add more heft to your résumé, introduces you to new colleagues in your industry—and could turn into a payroll position.

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### 9. Keep Physically Fit and Have Fun

Bad habits usually have a bad payoff. Watch your eating and drinking. People tend to abuse these habits when life is disrupted. If you're depressed it's probably easier to order takeout or go for fast food instead of cooking—but this is not the time to neglect good nutrition. Try to maintain the good habits you're used to.

If your routine includes going to the gym, keep going if you can afford to. Or find some other way to make physical exercise part of your daily regime. It is a fact that regular physical exercise helps to reduce tension and stress; a half-hour walk every day is the way to do it on a budget.

And we're not kidding when we order Five O'Clock Clubbers to take a break from job search to have three hours of fun a week. *Laughter is good therapy*. When you're unemployed you have more flexibility in booking the hours for fun: go to your favorite museum, or take in an afternoon ball game.

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**Rubbing shoulders with others in your field helps you to feel you're still part of the scene.**

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### 10. Five O'Clock Club Resources Are Your Booster Shot!

It's a huge stress buster for people to

see progress in their own searches—and in the searches of others in their small groups at The Five O'Clock Club. Countless times people have arrived at the Club feeling thoroughly defeated, convinced that their situations were almost hopeless. In a matter of just a few sessions, they undergo a transformation *because they see the methodology working*. They see others getting interviews, strategizing follow-up and landing offers.

The tools are there to help you overcome stress and paralysis:

- ◆ Do the Seven Stories Exercise and the Forty-Year Vision.
- ◆ Get into a weekly job search strategy group.
- ◆ Read the books, and re-read crucial chapters.
- ◆ Read the inspirational quotes sprinkled throughout the books—they're there for a reason!
- ◆ Relisten to the recorded lectures (on tape or CD) that apply to what you're going through right now.
- ◆ Review the articles in previous issues of *The Five O'Clock News*, such as "The Morale Problem: When You've Lost the Spirit to Job Hunt" (June 2009).
- ◆ If you don't feel like attending your small group this week, force yourself. That's when you should. You need a booster shot!

### The Twenty-First Century Career Continuum

So where are you in the scheme of things? On your second or third career? On your seventh job? Between your fourth and fifth? Yes, you've got to go through this again.

*Getting used to unemployment and job search will probably never happen. But each time you go through it you learn a little bit more about how to cope and conquer.* Learn the fundamentals of effective job search, build your network relentlessly, and recognize that the maelstrom of emotions is perfectly normal.

And try not to forget that, chances are, you've always got plenty of rope left. ●

### About Bill Belknap:

Bill, co-author of The Five O'Clock Club book, *For Executives Only*, has 30 years of senior management and human resources experience, with more than 10 years at the vice president level. He has headed the human resource function for fast-paced companies in a variety of industries, including high-tech, medical cost containment, consumer products, office products and financial information.

His areas of expertise include executive and career coaching, employee selection and retention, executive recruiting, and management training.

### About Renée Lee Rosenberg:

Renée Lee Rosenberg, author of The Five O'Clock Club book, *Achieving the Good Life After 50*, is a career transition coach and a career management consultant who brings over 20 years of coaching expertise to her work with The Five O'Clock Club.

An accomplished and entertaining speaker, Renée frequently presents on a variety of topics including, assessment and targeting, résumé preparation, interviewing skills, networking and accessing the hidden job market, mid-life career transition, and keeping your momentum through a difficult job search. Other topics that Renée covers include personality and job search, effective communication, learned optimism and humor as a tool for stress reduction.

### About Mary Anne Walsh, Ed.D.:

Mary Anne Walsh is a career coach and cross-cultural consultant who brings over two decades of relevant counseling experience to The Five O'Clock Club. Currently in private practice in New York, she began using The Five O'Clock Club methodology while living in London and Tokyo for 12 years, where she advised individuals in the management of their careers during their time abroad.

She also serves as an independent consultant for several cross-cultural advisory firms in New York and London, and is an adjunct lecturer in the graduate program at Caldwell College in New Jersey.