

"I have been in this job for 27 years. I have a high school diploma that's 27 years old. I really don't know how to use computers. I haven't taken a class in 17 years. I have been fired. I think it's time I start thinking about my future."

Recently laid off Maine worker

Thanks for input to this article are extended to the Bath Adult Ed. 2001 Customer Service Certificate Class graduates.

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Education Works!

Give Yourself the Pink Slip...before somebody else does!

By Tom Broussard

You are the weakest link—Good Bye!

Do you think your job is secure? No matter how secure you feel now, globalization affects us all. You must prepare now for the future. You are



going to be laid off—that is a given. Why wait until then before preparing for

your next job? When corporate layoffs scream from every headline, putting off planning for it is pure folly if not downright irresponsible.

Of course, these days you're not fired so much as you are laid off, outsourced, downsized, right-sized, or consolidated. Regardless of the politically correct term of the day, you end up on the outside looking in.

Survival—food & shelter

When we're fired, what is the first thing we do? We worry about basic needs.

We worry about money. What bills can I pay? What can I put off? How long can I go without a job—this is what we want to know.



The second thing we do is look for work! We will take a job—any job—because we know that no matter what the job pays, it will help stretch the money further. The job may not even come close to replacing the income just lost but it will help, at least in the short term.

What Priority Education?

I don't know where education ranks on that list of things that one thinks about after they have been fired but it must be way down on the list after eating and sleeping.

If education does come to mind right after being fired it is probably to say—“Geez, now I wish I had gone and taken that computer class or finished my



associates degree.” Upon losing their job, no one runs out and signs up for college!

Food, clothing, shelter—gas in the car—these things loom large.

Lifelong learning is...well, for life

Lifelong learning isn't just a fuzzy, feel-good concept. It is too late to begin thinking about what your educational needs are *after* you have been laid off. Unfortunately, for most people, that is *exactly* when they begin to think of it and by then it is too late.

The good news is that lifelong learning doesn't have to be a four-year college degree. Read a book, learn the computer, or take an adult ed. class, in anything. *Taking* the first step—any step—is what's important.

Too Little, Too Late

Our current workforce development strategy is primarily remedial in nature. It is designed to address the worker's needs *after* they've been laid off.

Re-employment and re-training laid off workers is an honorable goal. But if we are going to build a "world class workforce" we have to prepare earlier. The truth is we must never stop preparing.

Workers spend a long time preparing for their first job—12 years in school



maybe more. If they are lucky, they may get two weeks to prepare for the next one!

When you are fired

today, all you have is the educational equivalent of the clothes on your back. There is no time to re-train. It's a flash flood and you have to get to higher ground—quickly.

World class workforce

There has been some reluctance to state that we need to develop a world class workforce. As if saying it slights the current workforce—by hinting that somehow they aren't quite "world class" now.

We have always been proud of our workforce and the work ethic for which Mainers have been known. Mainers have always worked hard—on the land and on the sea.

But, the rules have changed. Hard work is still required. It just doesn't carry the same guarantee it used to. Now it is hard work *and* an education for all.

Job loss is rarely tied to job performance

Most of our current workforce was raised in a different world. There was a belief then that as long as you were a good worker, you got to keep your job.

Today nothing could be further from the truth. In the global economy you are much, much more likely to lose your job because of business conditions (heck, even weather conditions!) on the other side of the planet, than for doing a poor job at work.

Your company may lay you off because they have done *well* and have been bought out. Your company may lay you off because they have done *poorly* and have been bought out.

The technology may have shifted making what you do obsolete. (Bought a Beta VCR lately?)

The notion that hard work will protect your job is "*sooo last century*" (as the kids today might say.)

Employment and employability

The difference between employment and employability is the proverbial difference between having a fish and knowing how to fish.

It's the difference between having a job and getting a job. Education still does not provide old style job security. It still does not guarantee you a job. But what it



does provide is employability. Education provides the most necessary of 21st century skills—the capacity to learn, constantly and forever.

A world class workforce is an educated workforce. A world class workforce is an employable workforce. A world class workforce doesn't know life without learning.

Give Yourself the Pink Slip...The gift that keeps on giving

People just laid off are scared. And that fear triggers the "fight or flight" instinct. When you've been fired you get moving!

You don't sit around and review brochures or look at school catalogues.

When you've been fired you know there's not much between you and the street. Fired people are motivated people.

Since you cannot afford to wait until someone else gives you the pink slip then give yourself the gift of fear.

Give yourself the gift of motivation (derived from the fear of being laid off), before it happens. Sort of a 'Ghost of Christmas Future' kind of thing.

The real trick is to figure out how to get motivated before somebody else gives you the pink slip.

So it is not just education after all.

Motivation and knowledge of the rules of the new world economy are also required in order to protect our economic future.

I often hear the kids say, "You're not the boss of me! I'm the boss of me!" I couldn't agree more. We are our own bosses. So let's fire ourselves now! If we don't, we'll only have the boss to blame.

The Pink Slip Pledge...Repeat After Me

- *I will be fired and when I am, I will need new skills.*
- *I will be fired and when I am, and I gain new skills, they too will go out of date again soon.*
- *I will be fired and when I am, I must learn to manage my own career.*
- *I will be fired and when I am, I must teach myself the acquisition of new knowledge and skills.*
- *I will be fired and when I am, I will learn how to remain motivated and give myself the pink slip before somebody else does!*

