

Helping Managers and Executives Get Back to Work

By Sophie Braccini

When Glen Zamanian was laid off in July, he knew what he had to do. "This happens to people all the time," says the Lafayette resident, "but here in Lamorinda, there is an organization that helps experienced white collar workers seeking a job paying 60K and up."

The California Department of Employment sponsors a non-profit group called Experience Unlimited (E.U.), which is managed by volunteer members. The group organizes workshop, gives access to resources, provides mentors and gives each participant the structure, moral support and discipline that are needed to get back to the workforce. Participation is free but members are asked to give sixteen hours of work back to the group every month.

Every Tuesday morning at 9:00 am the group meets at 49 Knox Drive in Lafayette. This event provides an opportunity for E.U. alumni and members to have fun, network, and socialize. On average, about forty people attend the meetings; the age bracket is 40 to 60 years old, both men and women. Some were mortgage brokers, other V.P.'s of Finance or I.T. managers. Some have part time or short-term jobs, others are unemployed.

The meeting starts with members sharing their news, then the session breaks up into workshops. Newcomers are always welcome; they are introduced to the group's modus operandi and choose an area in which to volunteer: operations, marketing, I.T. or training. They



Tony Friday starts the E.U. meeting

Photo Sophie Braccini

hear about the different services offered by the group such as a counseling session for those who have personal issues, job search techniques, networking or salary negotiation.

The President of E.U. is elected by the group and is a job seeker as well as a volunteer. The current president is the very charismatic Tony Friday, who opened a recent session with a pep talk that had power and liveliness. "Keeping the energy up and firing up the attitude are some of the keys to success," said Friday. Since this group was created to help mature individuals, they are not shy to acknowledge that they sometimes encounter age discrimination. "We have all heard that people over forty cost too much," confirms Friday, "small companies can't afford us."

In order to overcome the age barrier the group proposes different approaches to job seeking. One of the tactics consists of first researching the hiring manager for the position that is

of interest. Once that person is found, one member of the group, or alumni, will be chosen to write a referral letter introducing the applicant. That person will have a logical connection to the hiring manager and will make sure that the candidate is well qualified for the job. E.U. has found that 80% of all jobs are obtained through referrals rather than through the usual ad-answering process.

The second step is to send a "qualification profile" along with the referral letter. This document is a chart that presents on one side the requirements for the position and on the other side the candidate's experiences that most closely match them. This document replaces the traditional resume. For those older applicants, a long resume starting in the 80's can lead to rejection. It is recommended to bring a resume for the interview, but people who have used this technique report not even having to take it out of their briefcase.

When asked how long it

takes to find that new job, Friday is a bit vague, "I've never heard of anybody who didn't get a job; usually it takes 3 to 9 months for someone to get back to work." Zamanian confirms the effectiveness of E.U: "Résumés don't get jobs, people do. Here at Experience Unlimited we help people network to expand their reach and help new employers grow."