



# How to Handle Discouragement

By Dr. Kathleen Begley  
Professional Speaker and Author

**Note to Readers:** *This free e-newsletter, sent only upon request, comes from Dr. Kathleen Begley, owner of Write Company Plus communications training. She writes weekly on topics connected to business and personal success. Dr. Begley recently launched a new blog called "Meandering to a Different Drummer." Click onto the website address at the end of this article to read her one-paragraph musings on life, death, and how to fit into your bed with three dogs.*

The other day, while getting my hair trimmed, my stylist and I got into a conversation about all the people out of work. "Yeah, I see it all the time," she said. "Guys without jobs come in with their hair pretty long, because they stopped looking for jobs, but say they may have an interview coming up – finally. I feel so bad for all of them." As a frequent reader of news articles on unemployment, I've long been intrigued by an official statistical category called "discouraged." Using my hair stylist's observation, I take it you can identify these people partly by the length of their hair.

Officially, the term "discouraged" represents hundreds of thousands of men and women who have been without income for so long that they have given up trying to find jobs. Just last week, the U.S. Labor Department announced that the unemployment rate had gone past 10 percent for the first time since the 1980's. When you add in the discouraged folks as well as part-time workers who want full-time jobs, the real figure is a breathtaking 17.5 percent. The previous high was 17.1 percent, back in 1982. Do the math. Almost one out of five people across the country are barely eking out a living.

Day after day, week after week, month after month, Bob Herbert, a tell-it-like-it-is op-ed columnist at the New York Times, writes about the plight of the long-term jobless. In a recent piece, Herbert wrote: "We've allowed so many people to fall into the terrible abyss of unemployment that no one – not the Obama administration, not the labor unions, and most certainly no one in the Republican Party – has a clue about how to put them back to work." Nor do I. But, having been unemployed myself for an extended period earlier in life, I do have some ideas on making the best of a bad situation. I'm unable to promise you a job. But perhaps some inner peace can help you get through another scary day. My thoughts:

**Get out of the house.** I know this is a big leap. Who wants to face the world when you can't even get an interview for an advertised job you know you're perfect for? I get it. But, in my experience, the worst thing you can do for your mental health is hole up in your family room watching television or surfing the Internet. Force yourself to walk out your front door every morning, to do more than furtively pick up the newspaper in your driveway hoping your neighbors won't see you and figure out you're an unemployed loser. A simple thing like joining the mass of humanity at your local library may help. The key is to evacuate your own head, which for many discouraged workers is enemy territory. Isolation rarely breeds positive thinking.

**Set 15-minute goals.** Never, ever sit down at your desk thinking you'll job hunt for eight hours at a stretch. Sure, you should treat looking for work as a full-time job. But do it in small batches. I recommend setting a timer for 15 minutes, over and over and over throughout the day. Each time the buzzer goes off, you can reward yourself mentally for making it to another milestone. And you can sign yourself up for another 15 minutes – or not. It's important to give yourself permission to shift gears without beating yourself to a pulp for failing to make an unrealistic eight-hour goal.



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**Join a group.** For more than half a century, Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)—the granddaddy of self-help -- has been encouraging people to conquer one of the worst diseases known to mankind: addiction. At AA, the main activity is talking. That's it. If sharing experience, strength, and hope in conversation can get people to stop compulsive drinking, surely the same activity in a job-hunting group can help bolster your confidence and stamina. Numerous area churches now sponsor such clubs for discouraged workers. You can do together what you cannot do alone.

**Talk to everyone.** Throughout my adulthood, I have obtained just about every opportunity by a chance conversation in a public setting. As a matter of fact, my entire career started by chatting on the street with an old friend from high school, who was leaving a position she thought I would be perfect for. I was.

**Check out the experts.** I just came across a great little paperback by Richard Bolles, the author of the best-selling "What Color Is Your Parachute?" The new book, called "The Job-Hunters Survival Guide: How to Find Hope and Rewarding Work Even When There Are No Jobs," addresses the current dismal situation. In 96 pages, Bolles provides more helpful information than I've ever seen in one tiny paperback. No matter how upset you are, you can slog your way through it. Trust me.

**Study sales.** Job hunting really means selling yourself. As distasteful as it may seem, looking for work is similar to hawking big-screen televisions or side-by-side washers and dryers. You need to think constantly about the benefits you can offer your next employer.

**Believe.** As trite as old sayings sound when you're feeling such pain, most contain more than a grain of truth. "This, too, shall pass." "There's light at the end of the tunnel – and it's not an oncoming train." "Behind every cloud is a silver lining." "Don't give up before the miracle happens." "The path to success is lined with failure." "It's darkest before dawn." "If it doesn't kill you, it will make you stronger." Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know. Bromides are the last thing you want to hear during this excruciating time. Listen anyway.

*Dr. Kathleen Begley has written seven books and gives corporate seminars on topics such as writing persuasively, presenting confidently, and managing positively. You can call her at 610-429-1562 or e-mail her at [KBegley@writecompanyplus.com](mailto:KBegley@writecompanyplus.com). She responds to everybody. If you feel you've become too busy to ever read this free, opt-in blogletter, please tell us to remove you from our mailing list. Although our feelings will be deeply hurt, we'll cheerfully delete you.*