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Sunday, August 21st

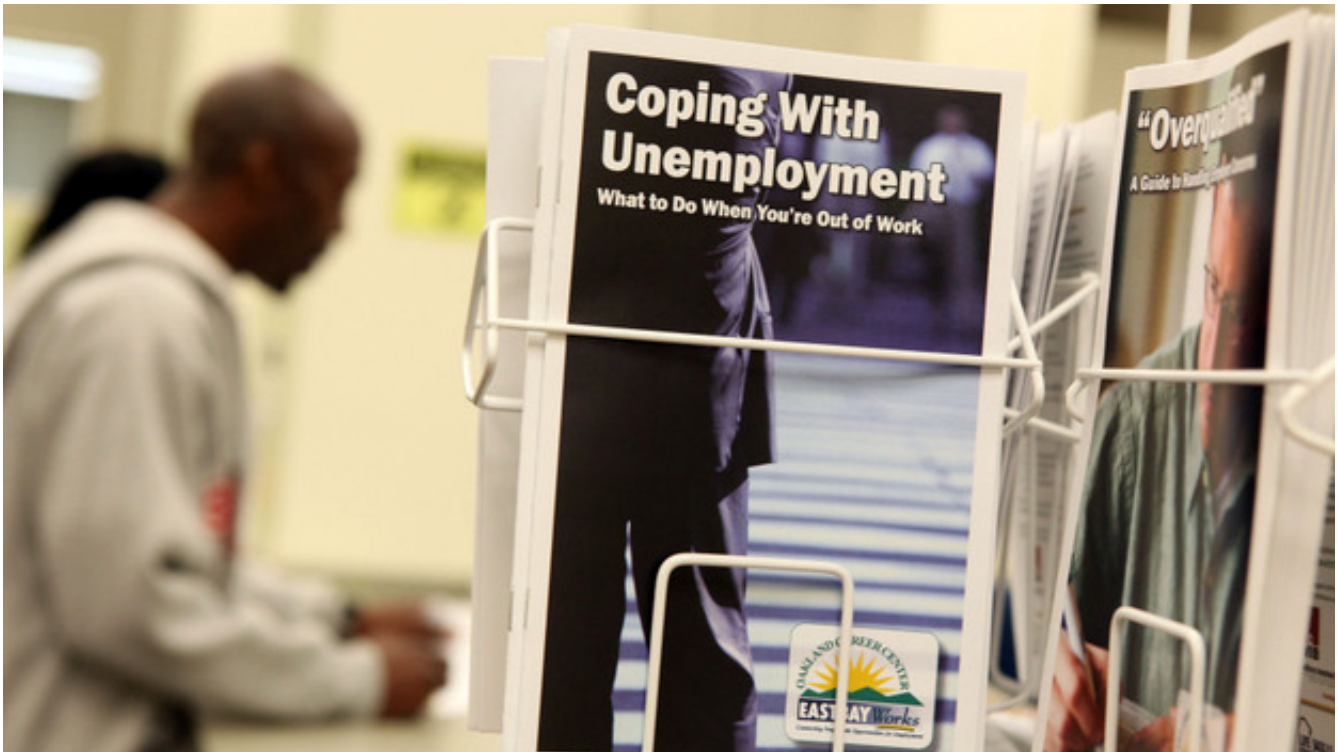
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MORNING EDITION

Job Seekers Find Bias Against The Unemployed

By [JOHN YDSTIE](#)
November 17, 2010, 12:01 AM



Pamphlets with information about unemployment are displayed in a career center in Oakland, Calif. - Pamphlets with information about unemployment are displayed in a career center in Oakland, Calif. (Justin Sullivan / Getty Images North America)

Unemployed workers face big hurdles as they try to get new jobs in today's economy. First, there's the numbers game: Close to 25 million workers unemployed or under-employed looking for jobs. In fact, there are five unemployed workers for every single job

opening in the economy.

Increasingly, though, jobless workers are facing the ultimate barrier. Some employers are saying if you're out of work, we don't want to hire you.

Until he got laid off more than two years ago, Michael Hall was a road warrior. "I would leave my home here in California about 3 a.m. to catch a flight and get home Friday around midnight," he says.

In between, he'd often make eight more airline connections as he flew around the country.

Hall's job was demonstrating high-tech equipment for data and phone networks. His hard work, engineering training and social skills helped him pull down a solid six-figure income.

But now Hall, who is 50 years old and single, spends most of his time looking for work. He says he has applied for well over 1,000 jobs. Every three months or so, he manages to get an interview. But so far, no luck. He says he knows it's not personal.

"But, try telling that to some kid who asked every single girl to the prom in his high school and they all said no. After a while, being told that you're not desired or wanted that many times, it might start to sink in, but you try to block it out," he says.

Hall says he mostly manages to remain hopeful. But he is really troubled by one thing: the prejudice many hiring managers seem to hold against the unemployed.

"Two specifically came right out and said we don't like to hire people that are unemployed. And one followed that with 'So, why are you unemployed?' in almost an indignant manner, which seemed kind of insulting. And the obvious answer is, well, because people like you don't like to hire unemployed people," Hall says.

This is a common complaint from unemployed workers -- that employers only want to hire people who already have jobs and that there's a view that there must be something wrong with you if you're unemployed.

Chris Shablak, CEO of West Coast Careers, a recruiting and staffing company, confirms those perceptions. And he says he has clients who tell him they don't want him to hire unemployed workers. Shablak thinks there are legitimate reasons behind that strategy.

"If you think about the talent in that unemployed market, you would realize that companies rarely lay off their best skilled workers," he says.

So, he says it's not surprising that some companies don't want to hire the unemployed.

"It's people that aren't top performers. So if you're ABC Corporation and you're trying to hire the best salesperson out there, and you're looking at unemployed people, it might not be the group of people with the best skills," he says.

Hall says when he hears that, it makes him feel like an outcast.

"It sounds, and it really feels like, society wants you to voluntarily walk out onto the ice floe. And I'm not ready for that. I'm too young to pack it all in. I've got a lot yet to offer," he says.

In fact, some other staffing experts have pointed out that given the massive layoffs in the economy, the chances of finding top performers in the current pool of unemployed workers is probably higher than at any time in memory.

And there may be another reason for companies to make sure they consider the unemployed.

"It's quite possible that discriminating against someone because they're unemployed is illegal," says Judy Conti, who represents the National Employment Law Project, an advocacy group for low-income and unemployed workers.

She acknowledges that there is no specific statute protecting unemployed individuals. But, Conti says, because people of color, who are protected against discrimination, have higher than average unemployment rates, an argument could be made that refusing to consider unemployed people for jobs is illegal.

"With record high levels of unemployment and with people being out of work for so long now, clearly this problem and this prejudice is growing," Conti says.

Conti's organization has brought the issue to the attention of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and she says the black and Hispanic caucuses are preparing letters urging the commission to take quick action on the issue.

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Transcript

STEVE INSKEEP, host:

It's MORNING EDITION from NPR News. Good morning, Im Steve Inskeep.

RENEE MONTAGNE, host:

And Im Renee Montagne.

We'll report, next, on the story of one unemployed American. It's a story you could likely repeat millions of times.

INSKEEP: The upside for Americans out of work right now is that companies are slowly hiring again. The downside is that Americans out of work may not be at the front of the line for those new jobs.

MONTAGNE: The very fact of being unemployed may be a disadvantage. Some employers are not eager to hire the close to 25 million Americans who are out of work or underemployed.

That includes this experienced worker, who spoke with NPR's John Ydstie.

JOHN YDSTIE: Until he got laid off more than two years ago, Michael Hall was a road warrior.

Mr. MICHAEL HALL: I would leave my home here in California about 3 a.m., to catch a flight and get home Friday around midnight.

YDSTIE: In between, he'd often make eight more airline connections as he flew around the country

Mr. HALL: Yeah, pretty hard-core.

YDSTIE: Hall's job was demonstrating high-tech equipment for data and phone networks. His hard work, engineering training and social skills helped him pull down a solid, six-figure income. But now Mike Hall, who's 50 years old and single, spends most of his time looking for work. He says he's applied for well over a thousand jobs.

Every three months or so, he manages to get an interview. But so far, no luck. He says he knows it's not personal.

Mr. HALL: But you try telling that to some kid who asked every single girl to the prom in his high school, and they all said no. After a while, being told that you're not desired or wanted that many times, it might start to sink in. But you try to block it out.

YDSTIE: Hall says he mostly manages to remain hopeful. But he's really troubled by one thing: the prejudice many hiring managers seem to hold against the unemployed.

Mr. HALL: Two specifically that came right out and said, we don't like to hire people that are unemployed. And one followed that with, so, why are you still unemployed - in almost an indignant manner, which seemed kind of insulting. And the obvious answer is, well, because people like you do not like to hire unemployed people.

YDSTIE: This is a common complaint from unemployed workers - that employers only want to hire people who already have jobs. And there's a view that there must be something wrong with you if you're unemployed.

Chris Shablak, CEO of West Coast Careers, a recruiting and staffing company, confirms those perceptions. And he says he absolutely has clients who tell him they don't want him to hire unemployed workers. Shablak thinks there are legitimate reasons behind that strategy.

Mr. CHRIS SHABLAKE (CEO, West Coast Careers): If you think about the talent in that unemployed market, you would realize that companies rarely lay off their best-skilled workers.

YDSTIE: So, says Shablak, it's not surprising that some companies don't want to hire the unemployed.

Mr. SHABLAKE: It's people that aren't top performers. So if you're ABC Corporation and you're trying to hire the best salesperson out there, and you're looking at unemployed people, it might not be the group of people with the best skills.

YDSTIE: Mike Hall says when he hears that, it makes him feel like an outcast.

Mr. HALL: It sounds - and it really feels - like society wants you to voluntarily walk out onto the ice floe. And I'm not ready for that. I'm too young to pack it all in. I've got a lot yet to offer.

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Ms. CONTI: With record high levels of unemployment, and with people being out of work for so long now, clearly this problem and this prejudice is growing.

YDSTIE: Conti's organization has brought the issue to the attention of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. And she says the black and hispanic caucuses are also preparing letters, urging the commission to take quick action on the issue.

John Ydstie, NPR News, Washington. Transcript provided by NPR, Copyright National Public Radio.

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[2011](#)

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August 20, 2011, 2:52 PM



That puts the unions on track to spend 60 percent more than last year and triple what they spent on lobbying just five years ago, according to an Associated Press review of state lobbying records.

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The Boston Red Sox rolled to a 7-1 victory over the Kansas City Royals Friday night.

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The state auditor's office has identified 163 people it claims tried to cheat the state out of welfare, food stamps, child care services and other public assistance in recent months.

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[Redistricting Could Merge Eastern Mass. Seats](#)

By The Associated Press
August 19, 2011, 2:49 PM

Reps. Stephen Lynch and William Keating could face off in next year's election if the legislative committee charged with redrawing Massachusetts districts chooses to merge their seats.

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By The Associated Press
August 19, 2011, 2:46 PM

Summer reading and a bit of golf. That says vacation for many Americans. And briefings on the economy and national security if you're the president.

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[Mass. Husband, Woman Charged In Murder Of Wife In N.J.](#)

By The Associated Press
August 19, 2011, 12:16 PM

A man who was injured in a shooting that killed his wife earlier this week was charged with her murder Friday, along with a Massachusetts woman who authorities said also was at the scene.

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[West Nile Virus Found In Over 20 Mass. Communities](#)

By The WBUR Newsroom
August 19, 2011, 10:03 AM

While there have been no human cases of infection, authorities are urging Massachusetts residents to take caution against the spread of West Nile Virus.

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[Report: Police Wanted Slain Boston Teen To Testify](#)

By The Associated Press
August 19, 2011, 7:29 AM

The Boston Globe reports that 17-year-old Elvis Sanchez and 43-year-old Elvira Pimentel were killed after the teen appeared at a courthouse where investigators wanted him to testify before a grand jury.

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