

Welcome to this newsletter, whose aim is to keep supporters, alumni and friends of Careers Springboard West Berkshire updated with our activities and ongoing developments. Our mission is to support out-of-work professionals and managers, and in these recessionary times, this has meant that we have been busier than ever.

Chairmen's Update

Last September, when the average attendance at our weekly meetings hardly ever rose above single figures, we started to wonder whether it was worth carrying on with this regular format. The recession changed all that!

Most weeks this year we get several new joiners – managers and professionals who have been made redundant, often having worked continuously in their chosen career for several decades. This recession has hit white collar workers hard. As a result we now have some 80 active members and weekly meetings attract 25-30 job seekers.

Fortunately, our cadre of volunteers has increased and our established volunteers are putting in extra time to meet the needs of our job seekers.

We do think there may be light at the end of the tunnel. In recent weeks, there has been a steady trickle of our members announcing that they had now got jobs, culminating in the last week of August with six job seekers proclaiming success. Let's hope that it's a V-shaped and not a W-shaped recession.

Finally, a hearty thank you to our supporters, both those who support us financially and in kind. Without your support we would be unable to help this particular category of job seekers, that most other initiatives overlook.

Some members' feedback on our meetings:

"I have already learned valuable tips on how to improve my CV – excellent"

"Very good exercise – a real eye opener"

"Great to network. Other people's experiences are most useful"

"Highly motivating – thanks"

"Keep up the good work. Thank you."

George Athorn and David Skyrme
Co-chairmen

Autumn Programme



Our Autumn programme is now published. It covers the whole life cycle of job seeking as well as four in-depth 'CV masterclasses' held roughly once a month.

You can download it at:

www.careerswestberks.org.uk/info/prog09c.pdf

What – no summer break?

Normally, we close for the whole of August for the summer break. However, with new arrivals every week, and a demand for our services, we ran a special 5-meeting summer programme. It offered some more in-depth topics than those of our normal cycle, including:

- Marketing yourself in the online age
- Being your own boss – alternatives such as franchising, contracting, starting your own business
- The interview – those difficult questions.

Despite the holidays, attendance remained high and some would like to see such one-off topics become part of our regular programme.

Keeping Going....

Our initial funding from the Branshaw Foundation is due to run out within the next year or so. Thanks to additional grants – this year we have received a small grant from the Berkshire Community Fund, which adds to last year's grants from the Greenham Common Trust and Newbury Town Council, we are able to continue a bit longer.

However, during 2009-10 we will be starting additional fund-raising in earnest, and may well seek your support. Watch this space



Some CSWB Statistics

- During 2008, we had 63 new members join us, even spread out at 16 per quarter
- In 2009 to date (end August), the corresponding number is 98, peaking at 55 in the 2nd quarter (April to June)
- The number leaving us with jobs was 7 in quarter 1 and 17 in quarter 2; this leaves us with over 80 members actively seeking jobs
- The average age of our members has been fairly constant at 49 last year and 48 now
- On average, our local spending equates to less than £300 per member who leaves for a job; our largest single expense is that for our meeting room.

The bigger picture:

- The number of job seeker claimants in West Berkshire rose from 801 in June 2008 to 2,359 in June 2009
- Over 100 international companies have created jobs in the Reading area over the last five years.

In the news

We have had quite a lot of media coverage recently. It seems that TV and radio want to have some human-interest features at the time of the release of the monthly unemployment figures. Amongst our coverage has been:

- BBC 6 o'clock News (April) – featuring a meeting and interviews with three job seekers (one in their home setting); as a result one of the interviewees landed a job with a regional recruitment company that was also in the same feature!
- BBC Today Programme (Radio 4, May) – interviews with job seekers and explaining what we do: “easing the anxieties of the unsettling changes for those who have enjoyed years of stable employment”
- Meridian News (ITV, July) – this item focused on the challenges facing our job seekers and interviewed Sally-Jane Lawrence at home (see profile below).



And more recently we have had Channel 4 filming 'background' material for a documentary to be shown in September.

We thank Newbury Town Council for permission to film and the job seekers who participated – putting up with “in your face” cameras during the meetings.

Profile: Sally-Jane Lawrence

Sally-Jane was one of our job seekers who has now been with us twice, most recently this January. Rather than a full-time job she has now decided on a 'portfolio career' sharing her time amongst several of her interests. She writes:



“In March 2007 I closed my own Executive Search Company after near 7 years' trading due to significant downturn in business. I was unable to find suitable permanent work at this time due to being 50+ years and over qualified (20 years experience). I took several interim contracts but eventually found myself out of work in December 2007.

I first attended CSWB in January 2008 after being put in touch by Job Centre Plus. Due to the quality material, encouragement and support, I found a noticeable increase in my confidence in just one month; I was able to find a suitable position with a recruitment company in Whitechurch and started in early February 2008. Although I was successful, I resigned my position in August and decided to take 3-months off work and to get back into full-time employment in January 2009.

Unfortunately, during this period the bottom dropped out of the market! For the first time in my entire career I was unable to find a suitable job!

I returned to CSWB in January 2009 and attended the weekly meetings whenever I could for 8 months. Initially I felt lacking in confidence, embarrassed about my situation, self-conscious about speaking to the group during the round robin and terrified being involved in various TV programmes! In time, I grew to really appreciate the unstinting support supplied by both the volunteers and my colleagues in the group. Although most of the material was familiar after so many years of interviewing and recruiting personnel, it was extremely useful and helped me to focus on my job search and finding the 'magic' combination to achieving job satisfaction.

After 20 years in management, it was foolish to assume that any potential employer would wish to employ me in a junior role – no matter how much I tried to persuade them otherwise!

I used all the techniques advocated by CSWB to find suitable employment. Sadly, working with recruiters did not inspire me, although one of these has since become a new client! In June, the CSWB session 'Your Other Choices' had a major impact. Two months later I decided to reactivate my recruitment business, work part-time from home and to gain additional sales support and motivation through joining "Forever Living", a multi-level marketing organisation who supply high quality Aloe Vera products. To complete my portfolio, I approached the Salvation Army and offered them two half days per week to help run their shop in Newbury. This has given me enormous pleasure, increased social awareness and a feeling of making a real difference.

My advice to anyone out of work and serious about finding employment is to keep positive by networking every waking hour! Write your goals down on paper; short, medium and long term. Keep updating these as you progress. Keep an open mind. Change direction as your situation or circumstances develop. Attend CSWB meetings every single week; share and discuss your ideas with CSWB members; add these new colleagues to your favourite business networking sites online.

Avoid sending emails when a personal telephone call will achieve so much more! Stand up and smile when you speak on the telephone and arrange as many face-to-face meetings as possible – believe me, this is the most valuable tool available, so make use of it every single day!"

Changes to our offering

While the overall format of our offering has not changed – weekly meetings, 1-on-1 support sessions, access to services provided by our partners and suppliers – we have added a few new features. One is an occasional short 'spotlight speaker' talking about their service after our main meeting. Recent meetings have included speakers from Business Link (about their Enterprise Gateway) and Mondo Challenge – about volunteering opportunities overseas and 'gap years'.

Other recent meetings and changes have included:

- A session with Newbury MP Richard Benyon during the Spring half-term break
- More external speakers (mostly recruitment consultants) on our main programme
- CV 'masterclasses', in-depth 2 hour sessions run by Hugh Miller monthly on a Thursday, in addition to our normal Tuesday meetings
- A schedule series of 1-on-1 consultations with two of our volunteers – Michelle Lucas and Janet Rutherford - during August.



Careers Springboard West Berkshire is just one of five sister organizations in the Thames Valley. Launched in September 2006, we modelled ourselves on existing executive job clubs at Gerrards Cross and Aylebury.

In 2007-8 new clubs were formed in Bracknell and Windsor & Maidenhead. We have now set up a more formal joint arrangement (TVEJC network), where each club shares knowledge and experiences, participates as an entity in some activities and pools certain resources as appropriate. The club chairmen meet once a quarter to progress things of mutual interest.

There is a network website at:
www.tvexecutivejobclubs.org.uk

New volunteers

We are pleased to welcome the following new volunteers:

- **Mark Robbins** – one of our job seekers, now back in full-time employment in IT. Mark has developed a highly functional database for us, that handles most of our day-to-day administration, including membership, session attendance, feedback, statistics and referrals. We thank Mark for the tremendous effort he has put into this database.
- **Nigel Henty, Bob Cooke and Pat Davies** – all started as ‘job seekers’ but now play an active part in the programme, either running sessions or behind the scenes.
- **Janet Rutherford** – an executive coach who runs her own business (The White Duck Coaching Company). She supports our job seekers with individual coaching and help.

Volunteer Profile: David Skinner



David spent 28 years in the RAF as an Education and Training Officer, instructing, running adult education centres and providing a resettlement service, and then as a Training Manager in policy roles in the Ministry of Defence. His last appointment was Head of the RAF Resettlement Service, appointing and managing a team of 11 advisers who provided resettlement advice and counselling throughout the RAF. He writes:

“When I left the RAF in 1999 and became an independent training consultant, I specialised in business communication skills, especially business writing, and outplacement. In the first few years I ran many workshops and conducted 1-to-1 counselling for RightCoutts, Chiumento and other outplacement agencies. That tailed off in 2004 for various reasons, and I was pleased to learn of CSWB in late 2007 from John Newell, another volunteer. I contacted George Athorn (the co-chairman), passed the selection interview (!) and became a CSWB volunteer in January 2008.

My main roles in CSWB are chairing meetings and presenting some of the workshops; the areas I cover are CV Preparation and The Written Word, which deals with covering and speculative letters, application forms and other forms of written communication for job-seeking. I have also hosted from time to time, and am the CSWB’s Employer Liaison Officer.

I enjoy the CSWB format and get a great deal of satisfaction from working with job-seekers, both collectively and individually, and seeing many of them move into employment. It also keeps me current in the outplacement/job seeking field.”

Would you like to feature in this column in future?

Then why not lend your time and expertise to help us help professional and managerial job seekers.

Please contact our Volunteer Co-ordinator George Athorn on 01635 253447 or email: george@careerswestberks.org.uk.

Workshop Feature: Telephone Tips

One of our regular workshops is ‘Hone Your Telephone Techniques’ in which participants use special 3-way telephone equipment to role-play various scenarios, such as “getting past the gatekeeper” and “making a direct approach”. Here are just some of the tips that have come out of these ‘telephone networking’ sessions.

First step - organise your data base

Everyone has a huge networking data base of contacts made over the years but may not realise it. Write down all the people you know. Include in your list, friends, relatives, business colleagues, former bosses, customers, suppliers, trade associations, and professional bodies, clubs etc.

Once you start making phone calls, and especially receiving them, you will need to know what you discussed last time and when to follow up. Use a spreadsheet or contacts database. A good one for jobseekers is jobtabs.com.

You're seeking information, not a job

Networking it is about talking to your contacts and seeking from them **information and advice** - and letting them know that you are interested in any job opportunities they get to know about. But you are not asking them to give you a job personally!

Initially, you may feel hesitant about approaching your contacts at all, especially ones you have not been in touch with for years. But when you do, you will find that most would genuinely like to help you and they are often flattered to be asked. They may have been in the same situation themselves.

Be prepared

Before you call you need to be clear what you want to achieve and how to handle the call to get the best response. Plan what you want to say, and, more importantly, planned responses to what they might ask? You don't need a full script but a card with bullet points in front of you while you talk can help you unfreeze.

You will of course have researched the person and their organization company beforehand so you can conduct a knowledgeable conversation.

And don't forget the basics. Make sure your equipment is ready e.g. batteries and headsets are charged and you have multiple pens on hand.

Be assertive

Follow the ABC approach:

- A - acknowledge: "I understand that you"
- B - bridge: "However, what I feel is that"
- C - confirm: "What I would like to happen is"

And carry on with D and E:

- D - determined and persistent
- E - easy to talk to be polite and don't interrupt.

Always come away with something

Never leave a phone call without gaining some information, other contacts, a good time to call again, the name of a secretary etc etc – to make sure you do not forget, have a checklist by the phone.

And finally...

Remember to smile – apparently the phone recipient can tell!

We welcome feedback, comments, contributions. Please send them to:

david@careerswestberks.org.uk

Thank you for your support.

Careers Springboard West Berkshire is a self-help group supporting out-of-work professionals, executives and managers in the West Berkshire area who are seeking a new job. It is a volunteer-led organization supported by the Branshaw Foundation, Business Link Berkshire, Newbury Town Council, the Berkshire Community Trust and The Greenham Common Trust.

We help job seekers:

- Assess career choices
- Improve CVs
- Find 'hidden' jobs
- Network more effectively
- Market their capabilities
- Practice telephone technique
- Be successful at interviews

through workshops, 1-on-1 support and networking.

We meet every Tuesday (except holidays) from 1pm to 4pm in Newbury Town Hall.
