


*Jim  
Stepka*

Seeing the Light Beyond the  
End of the Tunnel:

Thriving Through  
Re-employment



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Basic Assumptions

- Unemployment = loss
- Experience of loss unique to each situation & each individual
- Recovery = a process
- Process (denial, anger, disillusionment, acceptance, self-renewal) = not always sequential and may recycle
- New job does not necessarily = recovery
- Recovery → GROWTH

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GROWTH =

The capacity to THRIVE

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**“The Beethoven Factor”:**

The ability to creatively deal with life’s adversities in a way that allows one to develop an increasingly more encompassing and adaptive explanatory style

Paul Piersall, The Beethoven Factor: The New Positive Psychology of Hardiness, Happiness, Healing and Hope

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**Characteristics of Thrivers**

- They let their emotions flow naturally rather than cling to them
- They have faith that no feeling will last forever
- They understand there is an equally strong opposing positive emotion for every negative emotion we experience
- They understand that suffering is inevitable and essential for a truly authentic life

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**Characteristics of Thrivers**

- They seem to maintain a consciousness of adjustable levels of expectations, lowering them if they must and raising them if they realistically can
- They respond to crises as a mentally motivating mismatch between their current operative life theory and life’s reality and seek to resolve the dissonance
- They have the resilience to stay mentally engaged with their problems long enough to find meaning

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“Hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well but the certainty that something makes sense regardless how it turns out”

-Vaclav Havel

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**Thrivers GROW through adversity by:**

- Accepting the reality of pain, loss, disappointment as a necessary part of life
- Believing that for every valley there is a hill
- Accepting responsibility for their feelings – whatever they may be at the moment
- Adjusting their expectation
- Staying engaged in the process of making sense of things

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**Thriving Through the Eyes of a Narrative Therapist**

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### Definition of Narrative Therapy:

Based on the idea that as we absorb the vast amount of information our world throws at us every day, we organize what we see, feel, hear and remember into meaningful stories. We construct certain habits and relationships staying true to these internalized stories. We notice and remember things we find interesting, important and in line with our beliefs, expectations and prejudices, ignoring, forgetting or downplaying things that are contrary to stories about ourselves and our world.

Adapted from: Dr. Robert Rich, M. Sc., Ph.D

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### Basic Principles of Narrative Therapy:

- Changing (therapy) involves writing a new story, one that separates the problem from the way a person is seeing the problem
- Changing (therapy) is a search for exceptions; i.e., events/experiences that have occurred but were ignored, downplayed or forgotten because they didn't fit with the person's dominant life story
- The person is not the problem, the problem is the problem
- Change is the process of re-authoring one's life according to alternative and preferred stories of self-identity and according to preferred ways of life

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“Narrative Therapy has to do with learning to tell a different story of ourselves. Different stories are possible, even about the same events. How we talk about what happens to us depends on our starting point, and how we explain what happens to us depends on the questions we ask”

Paul Abels, Ph.D.

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**Strategies for Thriving Through Re-employment:**

- ✓ Stick to the job search routine that's been working for you
- ✓ Continue to take good care of your physical health (rest, diet, exercise)
- ✓ Maintain your support system
- ✓ Celebrate each small victory (send thank you notes to anyone who's helped)
- ✓ Do something for your mental/spiritual health everyday (pray, meditate, read, keep a journal, perform an act of kindness)

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**Strategies for Thriving Through Re-employment:**

- ✓ Give yourself a break – recognize that your grief reactions are normal and that your grief process is unique to you
- ✓ Be straightforward about your feelings
- ✓ Adjust your expectations as appropriate
- ✓ Adopt a positive frame of reference in how you think & talk about your life
- ✓ Share your new story!

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**Thank you!**

Jim Otepka  
TriCity Family Services

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# Thriving Through Re-employment

Jim  
Stepka

## Re-authoring Questions

1. What is the most significant obstacle you've had to overcome thus far in your period of unemployment?
2. If you were about to slip "into a rut" during your job search who would be the first to notice? What would they notice? Who else might notice?
3. Think of someone you know who has experienced the loss of a job and who, in your opinion, has succeeded in keeping unemployment from defeating them. What do you think has been the key to their success?
4. Do you explain your job loss any differently now than when you first learned you would be losing your job?
5. Imagine that it's three months from now and you are settling into a new job... What will the person who knows you best say was the key to your success in not letting unemployment defeat you?
6. If you had videotaped all your job interviews since the start of your employment and could watch those tapes now, would you notice any differences in how you interview you from then until now?
7. What, if anything, do you know about yourself now as a **parent** that you did not know before you were unemployed?
8. What, if anything, do you know about yourself now as a **friend** that you did not know before you were unemployed?
9. What, if anything, do you know about yourself now as a **spouse/significant other** that you did not know before you were unemployed? How has that discovery changed the way you relate to that person?

## Re-authoring Questions

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10. What, if anything, do you know about yourself now as a **worker** that you did not know before you were unemployed? How will that knowledge translate to being successful in your next job?
11. What have you allowed those who are the closest to you to discover about you since your unemployment that they did not know about you before.
12. Have you noticed any changes in your values, beliefs and/or priorities during the course of your unemployment that you feel good about?
13. **(Re: questions 7 - 12)** To what extent has your job search been influenced by these discoveries?
14. What roles and responsibilities have you assumed in your family during your unemployment? Which ones are you willing to give up or transfer once you become employed? Which ones do you want to keep? Which ones do you think other members of the family would like to see you keep?
15. What have you discovered about your life during your unemployment that you want to continue to build on after returning to work? How do you intend to continue succeeding?
16. What have you accomplished during your period of unemployment that you would have not accomplished by now - or perhaps ever - if you had not been unemployed?
17. What accomplishments are you most proud of? What accomplishments would you say your family is most proud of?
18. What would you have to do to sabotage or undo the changes you have made in your life as a result of your unemployment?

Otepka, Jim

## Resources

### **BOOKS:**

Elkort, M., (1997). "Getting from Fired to Hired." New York: Macmillan

Gordon, R.H., & Harold, C., E. (1997). "Climb a Fallen Ladder: How to Survive (and Thrive) in Downsized America." New York: Hatherleigh Press.

Hakim, C., (1993). "When You Lose Your Job." San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler

Lonergan, T., (1998). "Fired With Enthusiasm: A Take-Charge Plan for a Quick Career Comeback." Kansas City, MO: Andrews McNeel Publishing.

Piersall, Paul, (2003). "The Beethoven Factor: The New Positive Psychology of Hardiness, Happiness, Healing and Hope." Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads Publishing Co.

Rich, P., & Copans, S.A. (1999). "The Healing Journey Through Job Loss: Your Journal for Reflection and Revitalization." New York: John Wiley

### **INTERNET:**

[www.JobCircle.com](http://www.JobCircle.com)

[www.iVillage.com](http://www.iVillage.com)

[www.cope\\_inc.com](http://www.cope_inc.com)

[www.rileyguide.com](http://www.rileyguide.com)

[www.JobDirect.com](http://www.JobDirect.com)

[www.sharingvillage.com](http://www.sharingvillage.com)

[www.CareerJournal.com](http://www.CareerJournal.com)

### **OTHER:**

The National Business Employment Weekly publishes a list of local employment support groups by state in its "Activities: section.