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“What Should the Unemployed Do?”

In 1992, current Federal Reserve Board Chairman Ben Bernanke collaborated with Andrew Abel to publish a book on Macroeconomics. In it, they cite a pre-1982 study by Harvey Brenner, which concluded that the personal cost of unemployment is high—including deterioration of job skills, reduced self-esteem, and stress.

On a social cost basis, the study found that a one percentage point increase in the unemployment rate that is maintained for six years is associated with 20,000 additional cardiovascular deaths, 920 suicides, 650 homicides, 4,000 state mental hospital admissions, and 3,300 state prison admissions.

The upshot of these statistics is that we have known the devastating effects of unemployment for over 30 years. Consequently, if you are unemployed today, you should take care to not become another type of statistic—in addition to being an unemployment statistic.

What should the unemployed do?

In considering this question, the following low-cost and no-cost actions come to mind:

- Given time on your hands, if you have a family, spend quality time with each of your immediate family members and ensure that your caring and loving bond is strong.
- If your family has not already done so, then take the time to perform genealogical research, which can benefit generations to come from historical and health perspectives.
- Engage in costless or near costless efforts to improve your surroundings: e.g., conduct repairs around your home and improve the appearance of your lawn and garden. You may be unemployed, but that doesn't mean that your surroundings must deteriorate.
- Utilize your local library and the Internet to remain fresh in your field, or you can use these resources to prepare yourself for future employment by becoming informed in a new field. If you can read, you can learn anything. Get ready for a new job.
- Spend time thinking in an effort to identify new innovations. You may have a good idea within you that can be the seed of future employment or of you operating your own business.
- Learn to meditate. A recent (unreplicated) study indicates that transcendental meditation may reduce the risk of heart attacks and strokes among Black Americans.
- Assess your eating and drinking habits and make a commitment to modify your behavior by eating and drinking in a more healthy fashion. You may also find that you can save money in the process.

- Take on the challenge of identifying ways to save—even in the midst of unemployment. Your savings will come in handy should your unemployment compensation payments expire.
- Volunteer!!! Help improve the appearance and safety of your community by contributing time to neighborhood beautification efforts or to patrolling your neighborhood to improve security there.

There are, no doubt, numerous other effective and beneficial ways to spend your time while you are unemployed. These are just a few that you can use to improve the quality of your life and the lives of those around you. Being unemployed may mean that you don't have the income that you desire, but it doesn't have to mean that your life is not a productive and happy one.

Dr. B. B. Robinson
11/15/12

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