

The following article appeared in *The Daily News*, May 25, 2003

Labor group's job is finding your next one

Jobs. No other word means more to New Yorkers right now than jobs.

"The local economy is in very bad shape," said Jack Deacy, spokesman for Consortium for Workers Education. "It's a mix of the economic hangover from 9/11, and a general belief among people that there aren't any jobs out there."

"Citywide unemployment is 8.8%, 10% in Brooklyn, 11% in the Bronx. But despite this, there is help and hope through our programs."

Ask Dan Gonzalez, 47, of Spanish Harlem, who watched his computer information technology job go down with the twin towers on 9/11.

"I'd worked for Merrill Lynch for five years, but only for six months as a network security administrator," said Gonzalez. "So I was laid off."

For the next 10 months, like the rest of New York, he meandered through the smoky haze, racked with grief, climbing off the canvas and scraping for a future.

More than anything, he needed a job to support his wife and 15-year-old daughter.

For months, Gonzalez scoured the Internet and help wanted ads, and went to job fairs and endless interviews.

"I didn't miss a seminar," he said. "I realized I was lacking some advanced skills that employers asked for. My daughter even offered me money from her savings, which I just couldn't take."

"Then, one day, while scanning the want ads, I came across an ad placed by CWE."

Gonzalez went to the Manhattan office of Consortium for Workers Education, a free, nonprofit agency supported by 46 NYC Central Labor Council unions representing more than 800,000 workers. The organization's goal is to help people find work. If it can't find a person work, the consortium tries to help him or her get the skills they need to land a job.

"Through CWE," said Gonzalez, "I got a \$4,500 grant to go back to school to learn UNIX, Cisco Networking and Checkpoint Firewall, which basically means protecting a company's computer systems from hackers."

"Thanks to CWE, on Nov. 11, 2002, with my new skills, I landed a networking security administrator job with Electronic Data Systems."

Helping hundreds find work

Polly Wan, a career adviser at Consortium for Workers Education, has helped hundreds of people get jobs.

"People go through orientation and are assigned a career adviser like me," said Wan. "I do a background search. If

people have been having a hard time in their preferred fields, I ask them to think back and remember what other dreams they had when they were young."

"One laid-off wireless communications worker said as a kid, he always dreamed of being a cop. He was under 36, so I told him maybe he should try that. He did. And now he's a cop, and very, very happy."

Others, she said, can't see that their college degrees and work experience might already qualify them for jobs outside their chosen fields — say in human resources or teaching.

"All they might need is a short, intense training program to update their skills," Wan explained. "CWE can often get a voucher for that."

Wan, nicknamed "The Drill Sergeant" at the consortium, said her seminars also teach people how to dress for success and how to rewrite their resumes, using five strong bullets to emphasize special, eye-catching qualities that make them stand out from the crowd.

"Then I teach them how to network — at the gym, with friends, at parties, social gatherings," Wan said. "I insist that they always have a resume with them, even when jogging. I also teach the unbelievable power of the 90-second commercial. Those 90 seconds in a job interview when employers ask you to tell them something about yourself and where you see yourself in their firm in five years, are precious. Those 90 seconds can change your life. You must use every second to sell yourself as the best product you will ever sell."

Cooking up something new

One of Wan's nontypical clients is Lisa Jones, who once cooked in Gracie Mansion. After losing her job in a downtown bank job after 9/11, she felt a need to find the intersection of homeland security and public health.

"I've created my own unique niche," said Jones. "CWE got me a grant to attend Meridian Security and Law Enforcement Center in Bayside, Queens, to learn private security. I'll apply that to the public health industry in these post-9/11 times."

Wan was a freelance career counselor until her husband lost his job after 9/11.

"When he lost his job, our family lost our health insurance," she said. "So I took a full-time job at CWE. After months of searching for work, I told my husband that he should take one of my seminars."

"Reluctantly, he did. And he found a very good job. So CWE put us both back to work."

For information about Consortium for Workers Education, call (212) 647-1900 or go online to www.cwe.org.

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