

Unemployed After Graduation?

For many new graduates, there is a period of time after graduation while you're job searching, that you may be unemployed. Coupled with the fact that you're no longer going to school, this may be the first time in a long while that you've experienced this much space in your schedule. With no more classes to go to, assignments to prepare, or job to get up early for, many students find themselves a bit at loose ends. This experience is common and will end, but during it, it can feel stressful. Here are some tips to keep you going when the going gets tough.

- 1 Stay busy!** Besides your job search, engage in other things that matter to you
 - Start a project (build a website, organize an event, start a portfolio, write a book, the possibilities are endless!)
 - Volunteer (to contribute, make connections, find leads, get references, build your resume, and look busy)
 - Build your skills with classes (online, community college, community centres, and more)
 - Exercise – go the gym, join a team, jogging groups, workout buddies – the energy will help you on the job search
 - Work as a temp – get money, be professional, build experience, make connections
- 2 Focus on positive actions you can take**
 - Get support from job coaches, EI, charities, food banks, counselling
 - Treat job hunting as a project with its own structures and routines
 - Pay attention to other life roles (child, parent, neighbor, citizen, student, hobbyist, activist, and more...)
 - Reflect on your personal goals and how to get there

- 3 Watch your negative self-talk.** Don't get stuck in a self-defeating mental rut – practice techniques from Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) to challenge your thoughts by asking questions like:
 - Am I ignoring the positive? What's good about this?
 - What would I say to a friend in this situation?
 - Am I predicting the worst possible outcome?
 - Am I taking things personally?
- 4 Build your job search skills:**
 - Tweak resumes and cover letters
 - Refine your interview technique
 - Hone networking skills and strategies
 - Search for useful resources like books, directories, and websites

- 5 Most importantly, don't give up.** The difference between you being unemployed and finding a job is going to be the one last call you made, or interview you did that leads to finding work.

And don't forget, you are not alone. Most people have periods of unemployment and find their way. You will too. Get help from friends and family, or make an appointment with a career counsellor at Queen's Career Services for help. Recent grads get access to Career Services for 1 year after graduation, including counselling appointments (which can be done over the phone, if you're not in Kingston).



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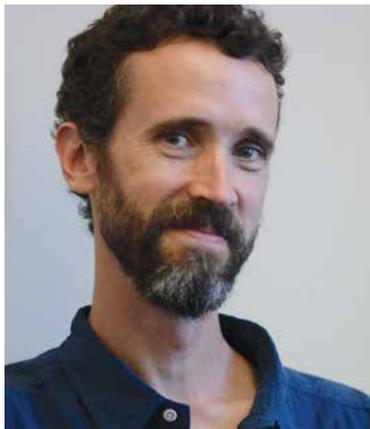
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Wondering How to Survive a Period of Unemployment? A Career Counsellor Tells His Story

by Miguel Hahn



Miguel Hahn

When I graduated from undergrad, I had a degree in History and Math from U of T, with no real idea of where I was going. I told people I would apply to get my Bachelors of Education, but wanted to take a year off before going, to explore my options. After graduation I returned to my previous job at a summer camp that helped me avoid the slightly scarier prospect

of post-grad job search. When September rolled around I did, however, hit the job search in earnest, ready to see where my adventures would take me.

Not far it turned out. At least, at first. I looked at online job boards, sent out resumes, got the occasional interview, but no real leads. After a few weeks I started getting a bit worried and was dragged by my friend to Career Services to check out their job search workshops. It really helped to have him as a job search buddy – we kept each other motivated. I also started to try to keep myself busy – volunteering at a nearby school, registering with a temp employment agency, and playing basketball regularly. All of this helped keep up my energy and stay connected with people.

A word on mindset

During my job search I had a lot of ups and downs emotionally. Some days I felt hopeless and like a total failure, but other days I was actually happy. What was the difference? The days I felt bad about my life, I was fighting it and looking at all the things that were wrong: I was running out of money. I was a failure. I didn't know what was going to happen.

But the days when I felt happy? I was looking at what was going right. At what I had to be grateful for. And one thing I had was lots of free time. I used it to do things I liked – play basketball, guitar, volunteer, and more. While I couldn't always enjoy that freedom, there were definite days when I relaxed into it. In hindsight, that time was really precious – before I got busy with work, I had freedom.

Ironically, while I was unemployed, I was wishing I had work, but often ignoring the freedom I had. And of course once I had work, I was missing the freedom to do what I wanted. Looking back, I wish I had let myself be happier during this time and enjoy that freedom even more without being so consumed by guilt and pressure to find work (although I know some of that was useful).

So, What Happened?

The weeks ticked by and in late October, after stinking up an interview at the Pita Pit (I was sick and totally unprepared, with no food experience at all), I got serious about interview prep. I did a workshop at the career centre, and landed an interview for a short-term position working at Career Services soon after – and nailed it.

Within 2 months, a position opened up with someone going on maternity leave and I was promoted into it with no need for an interview since I already worked there. My salary doubled, I got benefits, and job security for a few more months. I did end up going to teacher's college the next year, but came back to Career Services and have worked in the field for over a decade because it was a great fit for my interests, as it turned out – not something I was expecting back when I first graduated – but all of those things I did contributed to keeping me out of the rut of unemployment.

Miguel Hahn is a Career Counsellor at Queen's Career Services.

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