

*A Career Transition Ministries Network White Paper*

**How To Begin A Biblical Ministry  
To Job Seekers  
In Your Local Church**



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## Introduction

Those serving on Church staff or in lay-ministries are well aware of how God uses life circumstances to get people's attention. Some circumstances give us renewed hope and encouragement to live better lives. Some cause us to reconsider our direction while others force us to confront our own mortality. Whatever the case, major life events generally make us more open to considering spiritual solutions to life's problems. Employment turmoil is no exception and impacts affected individuals that reaches beyond themselves to include their immediate family, extended families and social relationships.

At times like these, the Church can offer ministry services that not only address short-term emotional and spiritual needs, but can also address long term needs to build up the individual's maturity and character and help them fulfill God's purpose for their lives.

National, regional and local unemployment rates are reflected within the body of Christ as well as in the local communities our churches serve. If you have a local or regional unemployment rate of 5%, you can expect about 5% of your church body and local community to be unemployed at any given time. Unemployment statistics, however, fail to reveal the number of people who are dissatisfied with their jobs, think they are under-employed or simply want to change careers. And then there are those who are nervously employed. These individuals have jobs they may even enjoy and find fulfilling, but external market conditions, business circumstances within their companies or their relationship with their boss keeps them awake at night wondering if they will have that job at the end of the week. These circumstances represent clear ministry opportunities for the church

Our purpose with this document is to encourage you to begin a practical ministry of help to those who are facing career transition or job change. This paper is not intended to be a comprehensive treatment of this topic, but should help you get started. Be sure to take advantage of the resources list provided for your benefit.

## Understanding The Need

Career transitions can be caused by layoffs, terminations or intentional job changes. According to the government's *Bureau of Labor Statistics*<sup>1</sup>, working adults hold an average of 10.5 jobs over the course of their careers with nearly 5 spells of unemployment. A 2006 study of employee tenure reports, "*the median number of years that wage and salary workers had been with their current employer was 4.0 years.*"<sup>2</sup> Other factors influencing the number of jobs held and career changes in a lifetime include age, income level and especially education level.

This data suggests that career transitions will be a significant part of the working life of people in your church body and local community. Unfortunately, very few people possess the knowledge or skills necessary to conduct an effective job search and this is where you can help.

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<sup>1</sup> Published studies looked at younger baby boomers born between 1957 and 1964. Additional details can be found at the following website:

<http://www.bls.gov/nls/nlsfaqs.htm#anch41>

<sup>2</sup> Job tenure is a measure of how long someone stays in a position and is an indicator of frequency of job or career change for all causes, intended and unintended. <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/tenure.nr0.htm>

**Why Should You Care?**

Work obviously takes up a significant amount of our time. Adult workers who spend 40 hours a week at their jobs can work 80,000 hours or more than 3,333 24-hour days working in a 40-year career. To a large extent, our work defines us as people and has substantial spiritual, financial, emotional and mental health implications.

What is the impact of unemployment on the life of the church and the communities we serve? Although it is beyond the scope of this document, Churches should consider the impact of unemployment and career transition on individuals, families and society at large. Social issues that can result from unemployment include homelessness, family violence and substance abuse.

Both the scope and impact of employment issues, therefore, represent a significant ministry opportunity for the church to serve your members as well your neighbors in your community.

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**The Call Of The Local Church**

The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Galatians exhorts us, *“And let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time, we shall reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.”* Gal. 6:9 & 10

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul tells us, *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”* Eph. 2:10 Clearly, God created each of us with unique gifts, talents and with a specific plan in mind for us. Later, Paul describes the variety of gifts Christ gave to the church, indicating some were given to be pastors and teachers *“...for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.”* Eph. 4:11 & 12

As we understand the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20), all believers are commanded to participate in evangelism and to make disciples. The church is called to equip believers and send them back into their spheres of influence to minister there. *“...And you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”* Acts 1:8. For most of us, our Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria are our places of employment.

To fulfill its purpose, the church should be actively engaged in equipping the saints. A ministry to Job Seekers will help us obey the exhortations to do good, to build up the body of Christ and serve the needs of our membership and our communities in a critical aspect of their lives.

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## **Problem Statement**

At any given time, up to 5% of the population is unemployed and in job transition. Another 15% are employed in jobs that give them no joy. Therefore, they are or should be considering a career change. The opportunity to minister to these two groups from a Biblical perspective is a mission field that is often overlooked.

## **Our Purpose & Experience**

**Purpose Statement** We want to encourage you to begin a practical ministry of help to those who are facing career transition or job change from a Biblical perspective.

For many churches, this represents a new area of ministry and community outreach, but thankfully, it is not necessary to start from scratch. Here, we offer you suggestions on how to begin such a ministry and direct you to resources that can support and assist you in this effort.

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### **Our Experience**

Our ministry team brings practical experience to this endeavor gleaned from many years of professional work experience, a good number of job transitions of our own and 15 years of actual, hands-on ministry to hundreds of job seekers. In the course of our ministry, we have been privileged to consult with many churches on the establishment of Job Seeker Ministries. We have also conducted an informal nationwide survey of churches through both in-person and telephone interviews. Our suggestions here are informed by our experience and survey findings.

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## Getting Started

We have learned that interest in Job Seeker ministry usually grows out of the personal experience and resulting passions of one individual. This is normal and consistent with the way God works and calls us into His service. Pastoral staff usually will not lead these efforts simply due to the plethora of other responsibilities on their plates.

### First Pray

We cannot overemphasize the importance of prayer when considering any ministry or outreach and Job Seeker ministry is no exception. We already know that God has commanded us to encourage one another and that the church is called to equip the saints. We don't have to ask God if He wants us to serve our members or our community, that is a given.

We do, however, need to invite Him into our efforts, ask for Him to raise up ministry team members and help us equip ourselves for this work.

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### Meet With Your Pastor

We strongly encourage you to meet with your pastor and church leadership to describe your ministry vision and seek their counsel. Any ministry outreach of this kind should be entered into with the authorization and sanction of your church leadership.

Don't be discouraged if your pastor doesn't share your initial enthusiasm and zeal for this ministry. There are two reasons for this:

- It is likely that God has uniquely prepared you for this ministry and has put it on your heart as part of His plan for your service.
- According to a 2001 Barna Survey<sup>3</sup> church members hold the average pastor responsible for more than 16 major responsibilities in the church so it is unlikely that God's call on your life is extended to your pastor or minister. Your pastor may be interested, but simply focused on other responsibilities.

Therefore, be patient and work with the leaders to help them understand your vision, but only expect them to encourage and support you in pursuit of your calling.

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<sup>3</sup> A Profile of Protestant Pastors in Anticipation of "Pastor Appreciation Month" - The Barna Update, September 25, 2001 <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=98>

**Who Should Start & Lead?**

Our survey results indicate that it is not uncommon for someone who is unemployed or in job transition to come to their pastor with a burden to help others in similar circumstances. They typically feel that the church should do more to help these people. Pastors respond by saying, "good, you do it."

Although seeking employment yourself does not automatically disqualify you from starting a ministry to jobseekers, there are a number of reasons you should reconsider being the leader while you are unemployed. You may have the time and the passion, but if you feel called to this ministry and you hope it will be sustained as an on-going outreach and ministry of the church, that may not be the best time for you to launch it. One exception to this suggestion may be considered if you are just getting started and begin with *Phase One* (page 10) described in more detail later in this document.

Our survey showed that ministries started by someone in job transition didn't enjoy much longevity. It is simply hard to maintain interest in this ministry once a person does land in a new job and begins focusing their attention there.

It was not uncommon for churches to have started Job Seeker ministries several times in the ten-year period prior to our survey. There is nothing wrong with that in general, it is just not ideal. Therefore, it is preferable for the ministry to be started and led by someone who is gainfully employed.

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**A Team Approach**

The church body is made up of individuals from many backgrounds and experiences that can be useful in a Job Seeker Ministry. We encourage a team approach so the ministry can benefit from these diverse skills and so that the burden of the work doesn't fall on just one or two individuals.

It will require the participation of several team members in order to conduct a sustainable ministry. Members may need to travel or could be unavailable due to sickness or other reasons. With a team, the work can continue on a weekly basis and not be dependant on one person.

The team should include both men and women in order to facilitate appropriate one-on-one counseling and ministry. Men serving men and women serving women. God is concerned with wholeness so you will find opportunities to minister in the whole range of life and spiritual discipleship when serving job seekers.

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**Good Career Backgrounds**

Successful ministries are made up of individuals with backgrounds in Human Resources, Training and Development, Performance Consulting, Staffing and Recruiting (retained search firms, contingency search firms), Personal and Professional Counseling and similar career fields. All of these backgrounds can be used by God to specifically equip people for this type of ministry.

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## Shaping Your Job Seeker Ministry

Job Seeker ministries can take on many forms and offer a wide range of options. Regardless of your intended level of complexity and range of service offerings, the ministry must be solidly based on Biblical principles to be successful in the life of the church. You will have several decisions to make, but we recommend that you start slowly and take a phased approach that can add format options as the capabilities your team improve and as the ministry grows.

**Target Audience**      Inreach, outreach or both? An inreach ministry focuses on the needs of your own congregation. Outreach, as you would expect, focuses on members of your community. We strongly encourage you to focus on both groups. This kind of ministry offers great opportunities for evangelism as you help people in their job search. Many of these ministries focus on the professional job market, but don't overlook opportunities to serve nonprofessional job seekers and those reentering the workforce after raising families.

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### **Biblical Perspective**

Biblical View of Work – Any student of the scriptures should understand that God created mankind for a purpose. In the creation story in Genesis, God gave Adam work to do even before He gave him a wife. Although our work is harder as a result of the fall, work is not a curse that is a consequence of the fall. There is a lot more to understand about a comprehensive Biblical View Of Work, but you should be sure to include this in the context of your ministry.

Job Transition – What is God trying to teach you in this experience? That should be a high priority question for all job seekers, especially during a spell of unemployment. There are no accidents in God's plan and timing. A period of unemployment can give you time to focus on more important things in life, beginning with your personal walk with God, your relationships with your family, or it could be a trial in which case God is giving you an opportunity to grow and mature spiritually.

Share The Gospel – Include a disciplined and systematic way to integrate the Gospel message. People tend to ask "Why Me?" and for unbelievers, the only good answer is the story of the Gospel. God created you to be in relationship with Him and this job loss could be His way of giving you some time to consider His invitation to a personal relationship with Him. The important question is not Why, but What. What is it that God wants me to do?

Include prayer – Be sure to keep prayer as a central part of your ministry. Not just for the ministry team prior to meetings, but open and close your meetings with prayer. Take prayer requests if your group is open to that as well.

Ministry To Believers – Being unemployed is always a difficult time for anyone, and unfortunately, even well intentioned friends and church members often don't know what to say at times like this. More than anything, believers need encouragement so remind them of God's promises. S. Truett Cathy, the founder of Chick-Fil-A has said that you can always tell if someone needs encouragement. Just look closely at them and if they are breathing, they could probably use some encouragement.

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**Format Options**

Prayer meeting – The most basic Job Seeker Ministry can simply be a weekly prayer meeting specifically for those in Job Transition. You can also include short Bible lessons on topics relevant to the group needs.

Networking – Between 70% & 80% of all new jobs come from networking, yet most people spend the bulk of their job search working the internet job boards and employment ads in their newspapers.

Networking is a component that can be added to your Job Seeker Ministry with very little effort. Begin by building a contact list of the people you know and members of your congregation (with their permission of course). Include information about their jobs and companies and ask them to contact you periodically if they become aware of job openings. Also get their permission to refer job seekers to them who may be interested in their company or business.

Add to this list the people who benefit from your ministry. Eventually they will land new jobs and could become resources for others down the line. This quickly becomes self-perpetuating.

Job seekers also have a network of colleagues and friends. As part of your ministry, provide opportunities for participants to share about their background and experience. Other participants can then offer suggestions of people they know and can provide introductions to.

One way to integrate Networking is to conduct “Networking & Job Lead Sharing Circles”. This is a group activity comprised of 10 to 12 participants sitting in a circle. Each individual is given a limited time to present their personal marketing statements – usually no more than 3 or 4 minutes. Other members in the group write down the name of someone they know who might be a good lead for that person. They provide leads based on known openings, similar job responsibilities, same industry, etc. After each person has had a chance to present, they can exchange leads.

Job Search Seminar - Teach a seminar on Critical Job Search Skills. Be sure to cover the basics like effective resume writing, interviewing skills and job search strategies. (See Resources later in this document)

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**Phased Approach**     There are no hard and fast rules about this, so you can decide to pursue one or all of these approaches for your ministry.

Phase One – Start out by conducting a weekly prayer meeting specifically for Job Seekers.

Phase Two – Add on the Networking or job lead-sharing component as soon as you begin meeting and grow that as your ministry grows.

Phase Three – Consider adding a Job Search Seminar once you have a sufficient number of team members and enough interest in your ministry to warrant conducting seminars. The needs of your participants will drive format, frequency of offerings and other important considerations. A well-designed Job Search Seminar can be structured in modules that can be offered one module per week or as a one or two day format.

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## Practical Stuff

### When To Meet

Knowing when to meet and where is an important decision to make. Do you minister to jobseekers in the early morning, during the day or evening hours? Do you meet on Saturday, Sunday after church or on a weekday?

There are advantages and disadvantages to each of these options. Weekdays may work for those who are unemployed, but what of those 15% that are currently employed, but seeking other options? Those early mornings are actually pretty good for networking breakfast or coffee meetings – that is meeting someone and letting them know of your job search.

If your ministry team is employed, it is unlikely they can be available during daytime hours so we recommend evening hours in order to reach those who are facing this challenge. We have found that Monday or Tuesday evenings are best. Only consider Wednesday evening as long as you don't interfere with other ministries in your church such as mid-week prayer meetings. Thursdays are not ideal and Friday would be your poorest option for a host of reasons.

Monday or Tuesday evenings work best, especially because weekends are difficult for job seekers and they often need some positive encouragement to begin the week on the right foot.

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### Where To Meet

Most churches have rooms that are suitable for meetings, but you do want to follow good instructional practices and have normal training resources available. Power Point projectors, whiteboards, flip charts, markers, pens and paper are all useful to have on hand depending on the format of your ministry.

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### Encouragement

Job seekers need a lot of encouragement for obvious reasons. These ministries have a surprisingly high drop out rate after a first visit, so you will need to include some retention strategies. It is encouraging for participants to see others "land" in new jobs. We even hold "Cookie Celebrations" for those who land to come back and offer encouragement to the group.

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### Equip Church Library & Bookstore

Be sure to equip your church library and/or bookstore with resources that would be helpful for job seekers. Please refer to our recommended resources list for suggestions on what you may want to consider stocking.

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## Recommended Resources

We would be negligent and unable to stake a claim to being a Biblical Ministry ourselves if we failed to direct you to the most important reference resource of all time; The Bible itself. Please understand that the Bible should be your first source and the standard against which, all others should be assessed. With that as our foundation, we also encourage you to consider some or all of the following resources. Some are helpful for those conducting a Biblical Ministry to Job Seekers and others will be helpful for jobseekers themselves.

**On-Line Resources**    Career Direct – Complete Guidance System  
From Crown Financial Ministries  
<http://www.careerdirectonline.org/>

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**Books**

Bible

Britton Whitcomb, Susan. The Christian's Career Journey: Finding The Job God Created For You. St. Paul, MN: Jist Works. 2008

Rawles, David. Finding A Job God's Way. Garland, TX: Hannibal Books, 2005

Blackaby, Henry and Blackaby, Richard. Experiencing God Day by Day Devotional Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group. 2006

Malone, Richard. Devotionals for Job Seekers. New York, NY: Galilee/Doubleday a Division of Random House, Inc. 2003

Nelson, Tommy. A Life Well Lived. Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers. 2005

Nelson, Tommy. The 12 Essentials of Godly Success. Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers. 2005

Britton Whitcomb, Susan. Resume Magic: Trade Secrets of a Professional Resume Writer. St. Paul, MN: Jist Works. 2006

Britton Whitcomb, Susan. Interview Magic: Job Interview Secrets From America's Career and Life Coach. St. Paul, MN: Jist Works. 2004

Britton Whitcomb, Susan. Job Search Magic: Insider Secrets From America's Career And Life Coach. St. Paul, MN: Jist Works. 2006

Ellis, Lee & Burkett, Larry. Your Career In Changing Times. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1998

Sherman, Doug & Hendricks, William. Your Work Matters To God. Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress Publishing Group, 1987 – 12-01

Bolles, Richard N. What Color Is Your Parachute: A Practical Manual For Job Seekers and Career Changers. Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press, 2006

Figler, Howard & Bolles, Richard N. The Career Counselor's Handbook. Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press, 2007

Crispen, Gary & Mehler, Mark. Career XRoads St. Paul, MN: Jist Publishing, 2004

Weddle, Peter. 2007/8 Guide to Employment Sites on the Internet: For Corporate and Third Party Recruiters, Job Seekers, and Career Activists. Stamford, CT, Weddle's; 8Rev Ed edition, 2006

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**Seminars &  
Workshops**

Check back for an updated release of this white paper for a listing of Seminars and workshops targeting Jobseekers directly and those who desire to minister to them.

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