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New program aims to address emotional toll of being laid off

BY DAVID YOUNG

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When Michelle Lange's Loveland-based company closed just more than a year ago, she had no idea the range of emotions that awaited her.

It's the slumps she remembers most - light depression combined with a feeling of hopelessness - as she looked back at the past year of unemployment Thursday.

But a new, small group of other laid-off workers, which aims to guide people through the range of emotions that come with being laid off, helped Lange realize she was not alone.

"Everyone seems to ride the emotional roller coaster ... the emotions you go through when unemployed and how to work through them," said Lange of her experience in the test group that is being implemented by the Larimer County Workforce Center.

The Larimer County Workforce Center and The People Business Inc. are launching the new program this month called "From Laid Off to Living."

In the wake of one of the worst recessions in history, the emotional toll on people such as Lange often goes unattended as the focus is on resumes, job interviews and finding a way to make ends meet.

"From Laid Off to Living" was born out of the need to help people bridge the gap from losing their jobs to accepting the anger and pain and moving forward.

Johnna Bavoso, owner of The People Business Inc., sees it as her personal mission to help people, which is what she has been working toward since creating her company in 1983. During the years, Bavoso has worked with different companies, helping develop team building and facilitate restructuring efforts and growth.

In summer 2009, she watched as some close friends lost their jobs and realized they could use emotional support.

So Bavoso started meeting with a group of 10 unemployed friends and writing a book, which she self-published in January, called "From Laid Off to Living."

The book provides stories of others who have been laid off and provides ways to address the anger and grieving that go along with being laid off.

In the end, it develops an "action plan" to help someone come to terms with their position and move forward.

Around a three-month process, Bavoso said it was therapeutic for some of the group members, and three found work.

"Three months is long enough to help people get in touch with their emotions," Bavoso said. "The truth is there is no magic time period."

When Bavoso approached the work force center about using her book, Dena Jardine, associate director of the Larimer County Workforce Center, said staffers were seeing job seekers going for more than a year without finding work and needing a different sort of support. Bavoso's book seemed to address that need.

"In our culture, job (searching) is action-oriented," Jardine said. "The support group is to help explain what is happening, why it's happening and readjust to what happened."

The work force center program, still deluged with unemployed residents, begins the week of Feb. 15 and runs through the week of April 26.

The center is accepting applicants for eight groups, four in Fort Collins and four in Loveland, with a capacity of 80 potential participants, around 10 people per group.

"The work force center cares about the health and support of our job-seeking customers," Jardine said.

While Lange is still in search of work, she is attending classes at Front Range Community College and volunteering at a dog day-care center.

"It is a really helpful group," Lange said. "We have bonded and all support each other."

Additional Facts

Interested?

Those interested in the Larimer County Workforce Center's "From Laid off to Living" group starting next month can contact (970) 498-6611 or lkerschensteiner@larimer.org.
