

The Reality of Unemployment

An article in the February 18th Business Section of the *Chicago Tribune* criticized a recent reality show on television called *The Job* where finalists compete for employment (it has since been cancelled). We haven't attached the entire article, but wanted to share with you the discouraging statistics that he cites regarding the long term impact of unemployment on our clients.

Ask Rex Huppke: I Just Work Here

February 18, 2013

Through this column, I have met, spoken with and given presentations to hundreds of people who are unemployed. There is nothing trivial about their situations, and nothing that is easily fixed, even if a job comes along. ***Consider a few facts from a recently released Economic Policy Institute book, "The State of Working America."***

Americans who lost a full-time job from 2007 to 2009 and were hired into a full- or part-time position in 2010 found their **weekly earnings had dropped by 21.8 percent.**

The report reads: "This research shows that the average adult worker losing a stable job will see severe earnings reductions that last more than 15 to 20 years compared with what earnings would have been had the job not been lost. One of the reasons for this extended spell of depressed earnings is that the loss of a job is often followed by a lengthy period of employment instability."

And the harm stretches beyond the worker. The study notes the trickle-down effect on children: "Parental job loss is associated with reduced academic performance and higher rates of grade repetition. Even grimmer: The children of parents who lose work have substantially lower earnings as adults than children from otherwise-similar families that didn't face job loss."

This reality is missing from CBS' show. I contacted the network, and a spokeswoman referred me to the transcript of a news conference the show's producers had in January. At that time, creator and executive producer Michael Davies said: "I'm proud to say over the course of eight episodes we offered more than 16 jobs to 40 candidates. I believe that the other 24 candidates, by the time this is finished airing, will all receive job offers of their own. And I think, more importantly, to a watching audience, people are going to learn about interviewing, about preparing their resumes, about the things that they need to know. ... And I'm really proud of what we have done in the series, producing such an

authentic series."

To the show's credit, it is sprinkled with job search and interviewing tips, but these are not revolutionary concepts: dress well for an interview; keep your resume to one page. And I'm willing to give the show's producers the benefit of the doubt that "The Job" is not simply an opportunistic play on a problem destroying many families.

But even with that, the thinking behind it seems to exist in a bubble, one that also encapsulates many of our political leaders who talk a good fight about solving the unemployment problem then fail to act or act in ways detrimental to job creation.

In March 2011, according to the Economic Policy Institute study, 45.5 percent of out-of-work Americans had been unemployed for more than six months. These are people who deserve help and, above all, respect.

I have had a man in his 50s break down crying over the phone, asking me if I thought he'd ever work again. I have interviewed people who have burned through their retirement savings and stood on the precipice of losing their homes, while trying to buffer their children from the crisis and keep their family together.

Whatever its good intentions, "The Job" is frivolity at a time when we need good ideas and serious reflection. Unemployment is a painful reality millions of Americans face each day, a reality that has nothing to do with excitement or dream jobs.

It's about finding work -- period. And it sure isn't something to be set forth for our entertainment.

TALK TO REX: Ask workplace questions — anonymously or by name — and share stories with Rex Huppke at ijustworkhere@tribune.com, like Rex on Facebook at facebook.com/rexworkshere, and find more at chicagotribune.com/ijustworkhere.

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