

Bouncing into success

Book offers advice on coping with a high-tech layoff

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Kathy Tremblay, 33, was shocked when she was laid off from her job at Dell's call centre operation in Kanata. One of some 1,100 employees to hear the news this spring, Ms. Tremblay loved her job as an advanced tech support person for Dell's gaming computers.

"I'd worked there for a year and a half. I loved my job, the management, the benefits, the people."

But Ms. Tremblay is a self-confessed opportunist and after pondering her situation for "maybe a day or two," she began to regard the rest of her life as an open canvas.

"The trick," she says, "is to get over it really quickly, talk to someone to get it off your chest, and then start thinking about what you can do.

"I know there's still something good for me, because I am a good, deserving person. The doors are open. And that's how everyone should think."

It's how Rosemary Wrong thought when she lost her job in telecommunications during the cutbacks in 2001. At the time, she was in her late 40s and it was her third layoff. Ms. Wrong treated the loss as an opportunity to build new skills. Her basic survival skill, a skill she believes everyone needs, was "Learn to bounce."

It's not unusual to see high-tech workers such as Ms. Tremblay and Ms. Wrong overcome adversity by being innovative in bouncing to their next job, says Anita Caputo, who runs Big Picture Institute, an Ottawa coaching and training business.

In fact, it was Ms. Wrong's attitude that provided the title for Caputo and Lee Wallace's book, *Learn to Bounce From a High-tech Layoff to Your Ideal Work*, published by Creative Bound International Inc. last fall.

Ms. Wrong is one of 32 people featured in 28 stories of "hope and inspiration" in the book, about individuals across North America who successfully went from a layoff to their ideal work.

Ms. Caputo and Mr. Wallace met by coincidence about six years ago, shortly after Ms. Caputo, now 49, was laid off from Nortel in the summer of 2001. Nortel was an exciting place to be in the late '80s, she says, and she never expected to lose her job there.

"At Nortel, there was always something new and exciting. The money was good. It was close to home. It was flexible. It met my needs. The benefits were good. So how could I have known the grass would be greener on the other side?"

She saw the layoff as "a huge opportunity to do what I always wanted to do." Only, she didn't know what that was.



CREDIT: Bruno Schlumberger, The Ottawa Citizen

Anita Caputo and Lee Wallace have co-written a book, *Learn to Bounce*, about how to turn a high-tech layoff into a positive life experience.

Paul and Sarah Edwards' book, *Finding Your Perfect Work*, provided the initial catalyst for Ms. Caputo, who approached the couple and asked them if she could teach their material.

Today, Ms. Caputo does management training, coaching, teaching at Carleton University, budgeting courses, public speaking, conference workshops and keynote speeches.

"I never appreciated how much work it is to be an entrepreneur," says Ms. Caputo. "It's a lot harder than I ever thought. But I enjoy what I do absolutely."

Mr. Wallace, 65, knew it was time for him to move on from counselling in the school system when they changed the rules on early retirement 10 years ago.

"It was an internal sense that it was time to move on," he recalls. He started writing and completed a textbook on career studies for high schools before he met Ms. Caputo.

"Most of my life I've helped people make choices about moving from where they are to where they want to be with confidence."

In addition to his private practice as a coach and counsellor, Mr. Wallace is a senior associate with the international career transition firm Right Management.

Ms. Caputo and Mr. Wallace began writing their book during the severest period of the high-tech meltdown. Their intention was to document success stories of people in the high-tech industry to help others going through a similar situation with solid advice and strategies for moving to the next level.

What they discovered was a deep emotional message in the stories.

"The emotional aspect was coming out loud and clear," Mr. Wallace explains. "And we ended up focusing on that more than we planned. We felt it was important because so many people go through it. The key is not to get stuck in the negative emotions."

Mr. Wallace and Ms. Caputo emphasize the predominant message of the book, "If they can do it, you can do it."

While the current spate of layoffs, particularly in the technology sector, is not as spectacular as that of several years ago, layoffs are a fact of life, the authors point out.

Learn to Bounce is a book, they say, that is relevant to everyone.

"The Dell call centre is another casualty of something that happens all the time," says Mr. Wallace. "So this is relevant and will continue to be relevant."

Meanwhile, the very afternoon Ms. Tremblay's layoff from Dell took effect, on May 1, she and a friend, who lives in Florida, were off and running with a new business venture.

Although in its infancy, Geek-NET Security (www.securemystuff.net) specializes in network security for Canadian and American businesses and personal users at competitive rates.