

# How To Find Hope During A Career Crisis

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[Forbes](#) > [Money](#) > [Retirement](#)

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How do you stay hopeful about your career during times like these?

It's a tall order. Unemployment is near record highs. Hiring is sluggish. And the triple whammy of continued economic volatility, civil unrest and Covid-19 has us all on edge. It's no wonder that 72% of Americans say this is the lowest point in our country's history that they can remember, according to the American Psychological Association.

Yet whether you're out of work, overworked or stuck in a dead-end job, the key to change is to *believe* that change is possible.

The actual tools of career change, like a polished resumé, robust network and optimized LinkedIn profile, are important, of course. But without hope — an underlying conviction that good opportunities are within reach — you'll continually struggle to do the hard work needed to move forward.

So, for ideas on how to maintain a positive mindset during challenging times like these, I turned to four career experts with extensive experience coaching clients through career crises. Here are their five proven strategies:

## **1. Tap the power of group hope**

“Trying to navigate your way through any crisis in life alone is very challenging and difficult,” says Susan D. Kelly, a Boston-based career coach and director of the free Massachusetts-based 50+ Job Seekers Networking Group. “But there is tremendous value in the collective wisdom found in a group dynamic.”

So far this year, over 200 of the 1,000 people participating in the 50+ Job Seekers Networking Group have found jobs.

Kelly says joining a job search support group can provide you with “group hope.” And she notes that the sharing of ideas, strategies and materials with group members can be extremely helpful. Even just marking your calendar for the next scheduled group meeting can become a positive anchor during the current crisis.

And there's proof that group hope helps. Kelly says that so far this year, over 200 of the 1,000 people participating in the 50+ Job Seekers Networking Group have found jobs, despite the pandemic shutdown.



## **2. Check your inner naysayer**

Joanne Waldman, a St. Louis retirement coach who spent 20 years as an outplacement counselor, encourages clients to shift their perspective from defeating beliefs to something more empowering by using a technique she calls “The Perspective Game.”

Here's how it works: If a client repeatedly uses negative or non-supportive words to describe their perspective, Waldman challenges them to choose another word starting with the same letter to replace that thought.

For example, Waldman coached a single mother who was unemployed and feeling fearful about her job prospects. “I asked her to come up with another word starting with the letter ‘f’ to replace the focus on fear. The client decided that whenever she felt fearful, she would shift the word ‘fear’ in her mind to ‘footwork,’ as a reminder she had work to do to move forward.”

Footwork became the woman's mantra and helped her move towards a more action-oriented mindset.

The Perspective Game is a simple, but effective technique to turn obstacles into opportunities, anxiety into action and roadblocks into results.

### **3. Upgrade your knowledge and skills**

When you learn new skills, that doesn't just add a new credential to your resumé. It pulls you away from your day-to-day worries, stimulates new pathways in your brain and provides a sense of accomplishment.

Many Americans are finding ways to boost their skill set in the pandemic. According to The Wall Street Journal, downloads of certificate-eligible LinkedIn Learning classes in some professions have increased more than 600% since February. Enrollment in micro-degrees and professional certificates at the online-course platform EdX have risen 6 to 15 times their normal rates.

Even mastering a hobby-related skill, such as scuba diving or oil painting, can prove beneficial.

"Learning takes you out of victim mode and into proactive mode," says Susan Britton, president of The Academies, a training program for career coaches. That renewed confidence can provide the motivation to investigate opportunities you might not have pursued otherwise.

### **4. Talk to someone new or who you haven't spoken with in a while**

When we're down, we tend to withdraw and ruminate on problems. Unfortunately, that tendency often proves counterproductive.

"The brain finds what it looks for," says Britton. "If you continually tell yourself there are no new opportunities out there, you'll struggle to find them."

But it's possible to reverse the negative feedback loop by talking with interesting and supportive people who can give you fresh ideas and perspectives.

How best to do that? "The truth is, we really have no idea who has a hidden connection until we start a dialogue, says Dawn Graham, author of *Switchers: How Smart Professionals Change Careers and Seize Success*. "In a world where six degrees of separation has narrowed to less than four, our career goals are more within reach than ever. And the simplest thing we can do to uncover opportunities is initiate career conversations with the people we already know."

Dormant contacts —people you've lost touch with or who you know peripherally from social media — can be a great place to start, says Graham. “They have their own circles and contacts, and it's often these second and third level connections who lead to your next job,” she says.

## **5. Exercise**

If you've ever exercised after a stressful day, chances are you felt much better afterwards. The benefits of exercise are well-documented: it increases feel-good endorphins, stimulates blood flow to the brain and reduces stress.

“Your biology determines your mood and can dramatically impact your ability to see the bigger picture,” says Britton.

Exercising on a regular basis won't just help your body feel better. It fosters a sense of accomplishment and control. And that, in turn, can fuel your desire to tackle career challenges with renewed enthusiasm, vigor and hope.

Here's to happier — and more hopeful — days ahead.

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