

Add another Frustration to Being Unemployed: A Case in Point from Indiana's WorkOne State Employment Agency

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(I'm sure unemployed workers outside of Indiana have encountered very similar problems, and can relate well to this particular situation; just one more frustration added to the already-present myriad frustrations of being unemployed and not able to find a job. Originally published in the July 2011 Movement, monthly newspaper of the Indianapolis Peace & Justice Center—GF)

On Friday, June 3, 2011, early in the morning, I went to an appointment at my nearby WorkOne office on Indianapolis' East Side to get help with my resume. I had a good idea already of what my resume problems were, and hoped for concrete assistance on dealing with an unorthodox work record that didn't show vital experience in certain areas where I had education, as well as workable tips on how to pursue a job search that would enable me to weed out potential employers who just wouldn't be interested. Instead I got a canned spiel on resume writing in general, covering everything in more excruciating detail that I already knew, and the constant admonition "Stay Focused!" whenever I tried to ask a concrete question. Finally, after being written off for any job using my educational experience (I'm a college grad, plus a trained paralegal, but with limited experience in several key areas) because of "lack of experience," I was then asked—oh so helpfully—by this resume "expert" about my unskilled warehouse experience. She asked really telling questions, such as this one (really!): "Did you ever load and unload trucks?" Real-world translation of the "skill" involved: "Did you ever pick up boxes?" But no warehouse employer is even remotely interested in a resume for essentially-unskilled warehouse experience! Or even skilled or semi-skilled, such as operating a forklift. When I protested this, I was quickly shown the door.

A co-worker of mine at the strictly temp job both of us have, that of scoring the state school system standardized achievement tests such as ISTEP, a job that requires all of us to have college degrees, even though it only pays \$10/hour, had a similar, frustrating WorkOne experience—that of a different employment "specialist" offering equally vacuous "assistance" with his resume. He wrote the following on his experience with two WorkOne resume building workshops: "I discovered at the workshops that unless one's life experience fit their preconceived cookie-cutter notions, they weren't really prepared to be of much assistance. The information they offered was more geared to someone who walked in off the street having no clue whatsoever on how to construct a basic resume. I'm pretty certain I learned a lot more from the book on resumes I purchased at the local bookstore than from the time wasted at those workshops."

From the above, it would seem that the only "employment assistance" that's of any value from WorkOne is that of assisting its already-employed "experts" to keep their jobs, no matter how much they fail to address and satisfy the actual needs of the Indiana unemployed.

And another thing—both of us got the same old saw that "There's no such thing as 'overqualified.'" Yet, that's what we run through all the time in real job searches. The most common refrain heard among my fellow college grad co-workers looking for permanent work: "We can't use you because you're overqualified and underexperienced." But of course, as college grads, we are qualified and experienced for strictly unskilled jobs, as WorkOne experts would tell us—but try and get one of those with a college degree!

And Indiana wonders why there's a brain drain! Is WorkOne part of the answer?

But that's just part of the malaise of unemployment and job search in Indiana. The fact is, all but low-paying jobs are disappearing from the state, and while we know the Republicans aren't serious about creating jobs, if we go by the record we see the Democrats aren't serious either. Both parties are committed, despite what they say, to settling for low-wage service jobs, with maybe a few high-paying specialized and professional jobs at the top. So Indiana is quite willing to import college grads with the "right" degrees from elsewhere, while leaving those Indiana college grads already here but who have the "wrong" degrees either packing up and getting out, or else ending up economically stranded—as my co-workers and I are, many of us having worked this strictly temp job for years now, coming back every year because there's nothing else.

Yes, it's madness. But yes also, no one seems to care. And WorkOne *has* a successful jobs program, only it doesn't tell the taxpayers what it really is—churn out worthless "assistance" programs that keep WorkOne employees employed, while the unemployed who need serious help can't get it.