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Down And Out In The New Economy: How People Find (or Don't Find) Work Today



Synopsis

~ ~ Finding a job used to be simple. You~ could show up at an office and ask for an application. A friend would mention a job in their department. Or you~ could see an ad in a newspaper and send in your cover letter. Maybe you~ could call the company a week later to check in, but the basic approach was easy. And once you got a job, you would stay~ often for decades. ~ ~ Now . . . well, it~ is complicated. If you want to have a shot at a good job, you need to have a robust profile on LinkedIn. And an enticing personal brand. Or something like that~ contemporary how-to books tend to offer contradictory advice. But they agree on one thing: in today's economy, you can~ not just be an employee looking to get hired~ you have to market yourself as a business, one that can help another business achieve its goals. ~ ~ That~ is a radical transformation in how we think about work and employment, says Ilana Gershon. And with *Down and Out in the New Economy*, she digs deep into that change and what it means, not just for job seekers, but for businesses and our very culture. In telling her story, Gershon covers all parts of the employment spectrum: she interviews hiring managers about how they assess candidates; attends personal branding seminars; talks with managers at companies around the United States to suss out regional differences~ like how Silicon Valley firms look askance at the lengthier employment tenures of applicants from the Midwest. And she finds that not everything has changed: though the technological trappings may be glitzier, in a lot of cases, who you know remains more important than what you know. ~ ~ Throughout, Gershon keeps her eye on bigger questions, interested not in what lessons job-seekers can take~ though there are plenty of those here~ but on what it means to consider yourself a business. What does that blurring of personal and vocational lives do to our sense of ourselves, the economy, our communities? Though it~ is often dressed up in the language of liberation, is this approach actually disempowering workers at the expense of corporations? ~ ~ Rich in the voices of people deeply involved with all parts of the employment process, *Down and Out in the New Economy* offers a snapshot of the quest for work today~ and a pointed analysis of its larger meaning. ~ ~ ~ ~

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Customer Reviews

“Sympathetic and wide-ranging. . . . The world she finds is terrifying and topsy-turvy. . . . When an old boys’ network becomes a young boys’ network, as Gershon so nicely puts it, there will be new kinds of exclusion at work.” (Times Higher Education) “Once upon a time, corporations were business enterprises which we were supposed to pretend, through a quaint legal fiction, were people. Nowadays it’s rapidly becoming the other way around; people are being pressured to imagine themselves as business enterprises. In this beautifully written volume, Ilana Gershon explores the subtle violence that ensues when, in order to get a job, you have to apply branding and marketing techniques to your own personality, and reconfigure your very sense of being in the world as a result. In doing so, she reminds us, more than any other book I’ve read in recent years, of the power of anthropology not only to expose the hidden workings of our everyday common sense, but also to show how strange and arbitrary they really are, in a way that can make us rethink almost everything we take for granted.” (David Graeber, author of *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*) “A fascinating, hands-on account of what’s really required to get hired today.” (Peter Cappelli, author of *Why Good People Can’t Get Jobs*) “Ilana Gershon vividly illuminates how workers have become ‘brands’ or ‘businesses’ in the new economy. Sounds liberating, but beware. As Gershon shows with numerous examples, the gain of the ‘personal brand’ may entail the loss of the person. And the gain of the ‘personal business’ may entail the loss of loyalty, security, and connection. This is a cautionary tale for all job seekers and the people who hire them.” (Barry Schwartz, author of *Why We Work*) “Gershon’s unique insights redefine employees as a personal business with their own brand. Her work offers incredible tips for those being hired, including personal branding, preparing a unique (and generic) social media (e.g., LinkedIn) presence, demonstrating value to the employer, building a personal network of informed colleagues, working with recruiters and

technology sites, and knowing when and how to move on. It also offers insights on how to do the recruiting as a line or HR manager. This is a creative, well researched, and useful book for those who want to be hired and for those doing the hiring." (Dave Ulrich, author of *HR from the Outside In*)

Ilana Gershon is associate professor of anthropology at Indiana University and the author of *The Breakup 2.0: Disconnecting Over New Media*.

This book focuses on one specific aspect of the new economy, the economy of the digital age, and that aspect is about the nature of employment and how one finds a job. It also enquires into the question, what does a job mean to the modern worker? The old format sees a clear distinction between an employer and an employee in that the employee sees himself as

“self as property” (Gershon, 2011, p. 1). He brings a set of skills and assets to rent to the employer. This is the proprietary idea of employment. Today, the employee sees himself as a “self as business” (Gershon, 2011, p. 1). Unlike the former where a career trajectory is visualised within the company, where the employee sees how far he can go if he works hard in the company, the “self as business” (Gershon, 2011, p. 1) sees a trajectory in the form of a string of companies. Thus the self as business is constantly switching jobs with the view of upgrading and padding his resume. Gershon discusses the pros and cons of the two metaphorical types of employees before examining the modern approach towards the presentation of the self as business. In the old way, that is just the matter of writing a job application with a resume attached. That has changed. Gershon examines the idea of “self as personal branding” (Gershon, 2011, p. 1), explaining how it became important, and what dangers it holds for the employee as well as employer. She says, “people’s ability to present themselves as competent job applicants can have little to do with what they will actually be like once they have the job” (Gershon, 2011, p. 1). In the chapter, “You are just like Coca-Cola” (Gershon, 2011, p. 1), Gershon discusses in detail the concept and practice of personal branding. Chapter 4 is another important and interesting chapter. Here Gershon discusses the use and usefulness (or otherwise) of LinkedIn. Not everyone thinks LinkedIn is useful enough to offer up one’s personal data for its use. There are also consequences concerned with the use of “second-order information” (Gershon, 2011, p. 1). Gershon (2011, p. 1) says an employer rejected an application for a sales manager’s post because the applicant had only 100 connections on LinkedIn. The hirer thought that a person in that position ought to have at least 280. Once hirers see job seekers as people entering into a business-to-business contract, hiring

policies will also change. Human Resource may also create acute problems for the hirer. Gershon explains it in this way: If a hirer is looking for a replacement for a worker who had just quit, and he may be looking for someone with a narrow job description. HR may think that the opportunity is presented to present a wider job description. The result is that the person employed would be disappointed with the actual job involved. The concept of the self as business has created new problems and will continue to do so. The structure within a company helps employees overcome racism and sexism. Gershon says that when the employees become business themselves, that structure is lost. New kinds of legal problems also arise. FedEx is being sued by drivers who are encouraged to run their own routes and learn management skills, but one driver is suing because he finds that FedEx will not allow him to buy other routes, and at the same time, prevent him from selling his routes. Are we now seeing the rise of a new legal entity – the dependent contractor? The old position recognises only employees and independent contractors. Gershon closes by asking a pertinent question: "When a business fails to sell its products, or to win the next contract, it dissolves. But people? What do you do when people fail to be successful in being a business for one year or five years? People don't dissolve like a business."

Great book for anyone with an extended job search. Also anyone in field of career services should read this book. Will help you advise your clients.

Most books about hiring give you the same old advice, just packaged in slightly new language. Gershon doesn't give you advice, she gives you a way to think more critically about the advice that you hear all the time, and think about whether it applies to your situation or not. Her basic argument is that our workplace these days is caught between two metaphors that frame our understanding of what it means to work. We either think of ourselves as rentable property, an older metaphor, or we think of ourselves as a business. And she talks about how we are all now supposed to think of ourselves as the CEO of Me, Inc, with not so great results for either people or companies. This would make a great graduation present, or maybe a great mid-life crisis present.

As the author announces at the outset of this useful study, "this is a book about advice, not an advice book," by which she means that, as a professor of anthropology, she is interested primarily in describing what is happening day to day in the corporate world of hiring and being hired as employees. Nevertheless, the book contains plenty of useful information on how to improve your

odds of being hired. She also provides current information on the use of various social media like LinkedIn in job search. Readers should not be put off by the academic content of the introduction. Ensuing chapters have useful things to say about "Me Inc." that is, the idea that when you are looking for a job you expect that it will not be for life or long at all, that you will use the job to pay the bills, learn new skills, build new networks, and then move on when you are ready. In other words, quit before you're laid off. A major obstacle facing job seekers today as in the past are the company staff whose job it is to screen out job candidates before giving the managers who actually make hiring decisions a short list of possible hires. The author suggests that various forms of networking offers one way around these gatekeepers. When I was involved in training job seekers back in the 1970s, we trained people how to contact hiring managers directly by telephone, the surest way to tap into the most hidden of job markets, the one that the hiring manager has told no one about yet. The telephone is especially effective in when dealing with companies with fewer than 200 employees, but it also works with larger corporations as well although the bigger the company the tougher it is to get past what used to be called the "personnel department." Read together with some of the practical guides to job seeking, Professor Gershon's book should prove useful to people hoping to further their career in the midst of today's unstable and often toxic job market. I, by the way, retired from that market nine years ago. Hallelujah!

Not particularly insightful. The author, purportedly a university professor with years of research expertise, simply recounts some information gathered on the 'New Economy'. Instead of trying to make some sense of it the author passes that significant task onto others. It's basically a news report on the employment situation.

good product with high quality. i need it to change , very comfortable and very fine . low price. I have bought several Bread products recently as I have started to make homemade bread. This product was reasonably priced and does an excellent job slicing our bread thick or thin. A buyer should not be fearful that this product is below par - very good product at a good price! Don't be afraid, just order the product and enjoy your bread.

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