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LIFE & WORK IN THE INFORMATION AGE

BY ANNE MCDONAGH



In the last issue of Learning Curves, in my article, Is it the end of work?, I concluded on a gloomy note, "What are the consequences of an economy that does not need workers? If we continue on the path we are on, the connection between work and income will be severed for most people. Wealth will be in the coffers of the owners of technology. The gap between the rich and the poor will increase to the point where the poor will not be able to support themselves or their

families while the rich will be wealthy beyond all imagining. The poor are not likely to accept this fate without a protest."

I also suggested that we did not have to go down this road to social chaos. There are alternatives. Jeremy Rifkin, author of The End of Work, wrote an article for the Utne Reader called "A View of the Future: The Good Life in The Post-Market Age." In this article he imagines a society vastly different from the one we currently have, but one which addresses the challenges of a

jobless economy. Here are some excerpts.

"THE YEAR is 2045. Life for most people is quite different today from what it was half a century ago. Perhaps the greatest visible change is the diminishing role of the economic marketplace in day-to-day affairs. Now that we are deep into the Information Age, most of the world's goods and services are produced in nearly workerless factories and marketed by virtual companies run by a small team of entrepreneurs and

CONTINUED ON 5



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GED + PREPARATION HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA

BY JOHANNA SKELLY

If you are an adult who didn't get a high school diploma, for whatever reason, you probably don't want to re-enroll in a high school program and work your way through years of classes. But if a high school diploma is your goal, there is another way.

The General Educational Development (GED) test is an on-line course that provides you with the means to acquire an Ontario High School Equivalency certificate. The tests are based on core curriculum subjects—English, Mathematics Social Studies and Science—and are administered by the Independent Learning Centre (ILC) in Ontario. You can go to www.ILC.org or call in Toronto 416-484-2704, or toll free at 1-800-387-5512. Staff is

available to take calls every afternoon, Monday to Friday from 12pm to 5pm.

GED testing allows you to study at your own pace, receive online tutoring, and have access to an online instructor every day. The ILC understands that, as an adult learner, you may well have acquired real-life knowledge that will allow you to work at a higher grade level than the one where you left off. So, if you stopped just short of getting a high school diploma or if you need more extensive review, the GED study guide is designed to allow you to review and strengthen each subject area, based on your current knowledge.

Following are some basic Questions & Answers to help you determine if GED testing is for you.

WHAT IS GED TESTING?

If you are an adult who did not complete a formal high school program, the GED test will provide you with the level of skills and knowledge of a high school equivalency program.

WHO CAN TAKE IT?

Any Ontario resident who is 18 years of age or older and has been out of school for one full year is eligible.

WHY CHOOSE GED?

A high school diploma can make all the difference in your qualifying for a job, being promoted where you work, entering a training or apprenticeship program or pursuing higher education.

WHAT IF I'M NOT SURE WHAT LEVEL OF SCHOOLING I NEED?

Even before you explore the idea of going back to school, you can go to a city-by-city listing of preparatory centres that can be found at www.ilc.org/ged/prep_centres.php. The GED work booklet can be downloaded and this will give you a clear idea of what subjects you need to study.

HOW MUCH DOES IT COST?

The cost for the 5 courses is \$100. The study guide is \$18, and can be ordered from the ILC site.

WHAT IS ON THE GED TESTS?

The GED tests are a set of five tests in the core high school curriculum areas: Language Arts: Writing, Language Arts: Reading, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies. Part 1 (use of calculator) Mathematics : Part 2 (no calculator)

The tests measure important knowledge and skills such as your ability to understand and apply information; to evaluate, analyze, and draw conclusions; and to express ideas and opinions in writing that are usually acquired during a regular high school program of study. You can go to the GED site and see the complete test outline.

WHAT KIND OF TEST QUESTIONS ARE ON THE EXAM?

All of the tests contain questions that require the use of important ideas and thinking skills and are formatted as multiple choice questions. Few of the questions ask for isolated details, definitions, or specific facts.

The Language Arts: Writing

Test includes an essay component that a candidate must pass in order to receive a score for the test.

The Mathematics test includes the use of standard and coordinate plane graphs and a calculator.

The tests are available in English and French. Special editions and testing accommodations are available to help people with special needs and physical and/or learning disabilities. The tests used in Canada have been developed especially for Canadians.

HOW DO I FIND OUT MORE?

Detailed information is available on the GED web site at www.ilc.org. There you will find the application form you'll need to fill out, the location of the ILC (in Toronto, 2180 Yonge Street, Toronto, ON N4S 2B9) where you go to take the test, directions on ordering the study guide, information on the academic requirements you need and even samples of how the tests are laid out.

Once you have decided to enroll for GED testing, the steps are simple. **Step 1:** The GED site lists the testing dates. Checking these dates is the very first step for you to take. However, this does not mean that you have to book a date at this time. The testing dates and times just allow you to think ahead and decide for yourself when you will feel ready to write the GED test.

Step 2: Go to GED's website at www.ilc.org. Download and print an application form.

Step 3: Complete the form and return it with payment and a photocopy of a document that proves you are 18 years of age or older to:

The GED Coordinator at the
Independent Learning Centre
PO Box 200, Station Q,
Toronto, ON M4T 2T1.

Or

If you are paying by credit card, you may fax your completed application to 416.484.2750 or email it to ged@tvo.org.

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If a high school diploma is one of those things you always meant to go back and get, check the GED web site for complete details on how you can do this, today.

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Gabriel Paiva

Student, Communications Certificate, and
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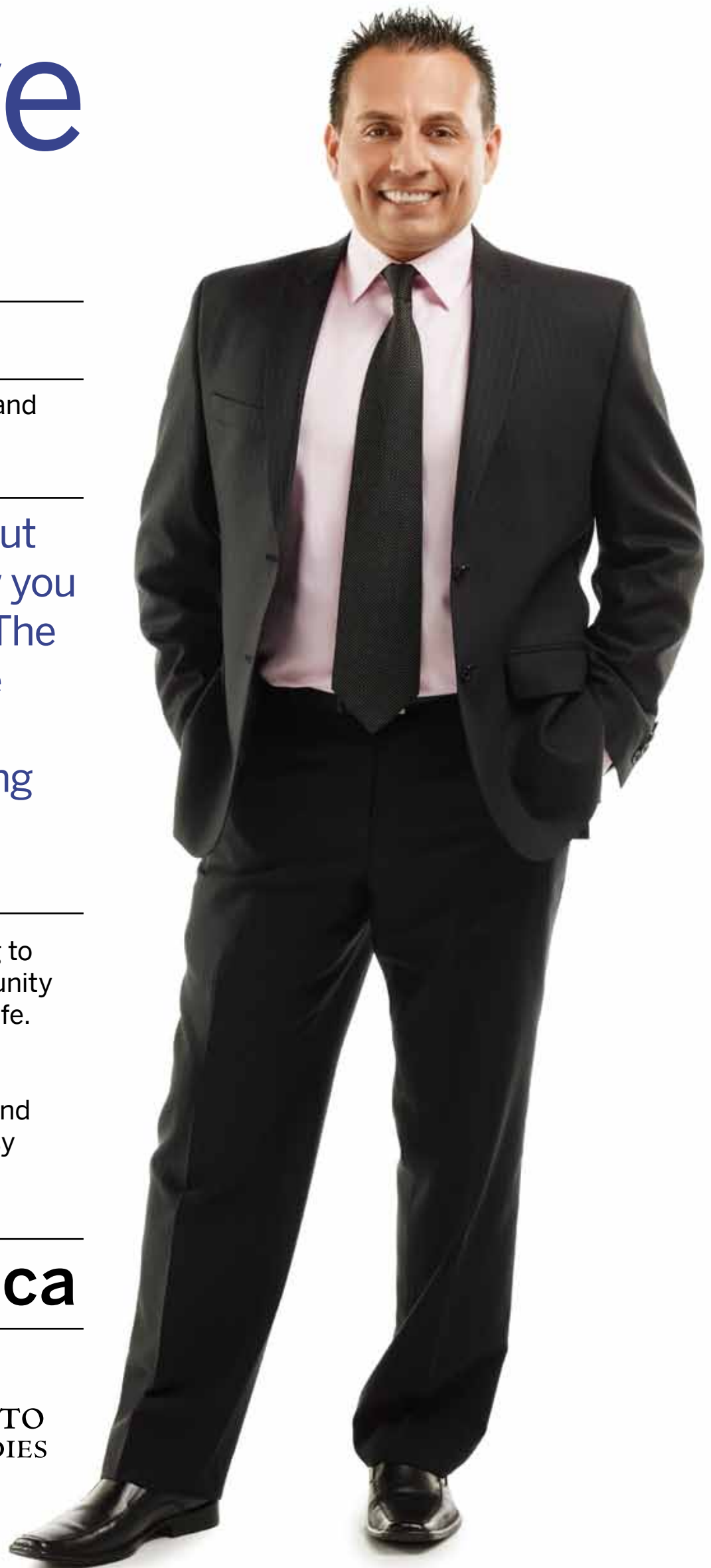
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LIFE & WORK IN THE INFORMATION AGE

highly trained professionals. Sophisticated computers, robots, and state-of-the-art telecommunications technologies have replaced the "worker" of the industrial era. Less than 20 percent of the adult population works full time.

"Most people receive their economic livelihood, in the form of voucher payments, from their local governing body in return for community service work in non-profit organizations..."

"The values of the market economy that so dominated the industrial era have steadily given way to a new ethos based on personal transformation, community participation, and global responsibility..."

"The older market system reinforced a materialist vision glorifying production and efficiency as the chief means of advancing happiness... People thought of themselves first and foremost as "consumers," not as neighbors or citizens..."

"The transition to a Post-Market Era has not been easy...Although some opposition continues to this day from critics clinging to the values of the 20th-century market ethos, most people have adjusted well to the new Post-Market Era, enjoying the freedom that comes with less work in the marketplace."

Clearly, Rifkin has done away with the only economic model we have ever known—capitalism. Many questions about the

feasibility and desirability of this scenario spring to mind: Are there any signs that society is ready for such systemic change? There is certainly dissatisfaction among the 99% of us who have watched the 1% amass their fortunes. It seems, however, that we are powerless to make much smaller changes in our society let alone major ones such as Rifkin suggests. Are there other less radical possibilities which, nevertheless, address the problems of the unequal distribution of wealth and the ensuing anarchy? Indeed there are, and they support Rifkin's ideas.

In fact, several schemes have been put forward over the years, which if implemented would go a long way towards alleviating the problems caused by "the end of work." They are the Tobin tax, a Guaranteed Annual Income and a shorter work week/day. There are probably other solutions as well, but if we applied these, even the least among us would have enough to survive on and we would have twice as many jobs.

The Tobin tax gets its name from James Tobin, a Nobel prizewinning American economist, who first proposed, in 1978, that international financial transactions should be taxed. (It has also been called other things such as the Robin Hood tax.) The tax would be very little, about .05%, but it would generate trillions of dollars a year that could be used by governments for the public good.

The Guaranteed Annual Income would replace the many social supports that we now call the "safety net", which in theory would save money. By itself, it may not be possible to provide enough for subsistence on the Guaranteed Annual Income, but combined with the Tobin tax there would be more money available to the government that could be applied to the GAI.

Now to the shorter work week/day. Germany's experience of the recent recession was just as severe as North America's, but the unemployment rate was more manageable than in the United States. Why? Because firms were encouraged by government to cut the number of hours each worker worked in the week and then hire more workers. The government made up the difference in pay to the workers. And so more workers were needed.

Even before automation, there were some who advocated a shorter work week and believed it was possible. Bertrand Russell, the famous British philosopher, was one who thought a 4-hour work day was plenty.

The following are excerpts from his essay "In Praise of Idleness" written in 1932.

[With a four-hour work day] "there will be happiness and joy of life, instead of frayed nerves, weariness, and dyspepsia. The work exacted will be enough to make leisure delightful, but not enough to produce

exhaustion. Since men will not be tired in their spare time, they will not demand only such amusements as are passive and vapid..."

"Ordinary men and women, having the opportunity of a happy life, will become more kindly and less persecuting and less inclined to view others with suspicion..."

"Modern methods of production have given us the possibility of ease and security for all; we have chosen, instead, to have overwork for some and starvation for others. Hitherto we have continued to be as energetic as we were before there were machines; in this we have been foolish, but there is no reason to go on being foolish forever."



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WRITING AGAINST THE CLOCK

BY: LISA TRUDEL

If you are an adult learner, job seeker or employee, what do you do when the clock is ticking and the page is blank? If you are in school, are you trying to complete an essay or assignment that is due in the morning? If you are a job seeker, are you trying to compose a deadline-driven cover letter? If you are an employee, are you trying to write an email providing instructions that needs to be sent before you leave for the day?

Whichever you are, if your fingers are frozen on the keyboard, what do you do?

Writer's block is common, especially if writing is not your favourite task or even if it is. Panic can hit as you stare at an empty computer screen that should reflect what your supervisor or teacher already expects on his/her desk.

The issue of writing fast is complicated and it is not necessarily about keyboarding fast. It all depends on the content, complexity, audience and situation. Writing fast is about clearing the mind so that you can write as easily as you speak. To help with writing against the clock, here are three useful tips:

1. Remember the three big questions. Before any writer takes on an assignment or chooses to write something, there are three questions to ask:

- Where am I going?
- When must I get there?
- How will I get there?

Writing is a journey and whenever you are pressured for time, these questions

are imperative. For example, in the first question of "Where am I going?" answering this demands a purpose and a specific audience. Answers could include:

For a job seeker: I am writing a cover letter to accompany my resume both of which are tailored to a specific job ad.

For an employee: I am writing an email to my manager with a proposal for a new laptop.

For the second question of "When must I get there?" answering this locks you into a no-excuse commitment to finishing the writing task at a specific time ahead of schedule. For example, answers could include:

For a job seeker: If the deadline for the job posting is next week, I won't wait until the deadline but instead will send in my application as soon as possible since employers might close the competition deadline without warning.

For an employee: If my manager expects the proposal for a new laptop by Thursday, I will have it ready by Wednesday.

For the third question of "How will I get there?" answering this requires a straightforward attack with supporting details, which you can gather through research or various resources. For example, answers could include:

For a job seeker: For my cover letter I will use a t-bar style letter which will demonstrate my best skills efficiently and effectively to the reader.

For an employee: In my laptop proposal I will mention the options, cost and benefit.

2. Build a writing world. Strength as

a writer means having a strong attitude in approaching writing and having a good system when delivering the final product.

Writing is very much a physical and mental activity so writing fast requires a checklist of specific environmental concerns beyond having a working computer.

For example, it is important that you are writing in an area with good lighting, temperature, ventilation and controllable noise levels. Your writing environment is directly linked to your productivity so watching for these concerns might improve your speed.

Additional environmental concerns include possibly making ergonomic improvements if you need to. Do you have an appropriate and comfortable chair and desk area? Can you reduce clutter or loose papers that might be in your way?

Another part of creating a suitable writing world in order to write fast, is checking that you have your favourite reference books nearby, bookmarking online resources, considering the time of day that you are writing, counting the number of words you are writing, and believing in yourself. Lacking confidence in your ability to get the job done successfully will slow down your writing and might cause you to miss deadlines.

3. Identify energy stoppers. The most common reason that stops writers from putting pen to paper is working without a plan. Writing slowly can be due to trying to draft something without a plan in mind. As a result, you stare blankly at the screen without

being able to generate ideas. Creating a plan will promote writing efficiency and can help to cultivate productivity instead of waste.

Another energy stopper is trying to do everything all at once. Rewriting every sentence, and sometimes every word, until you get it right, can be a foolish approach for two reasons. One is that you might not even use the sentence in the finished product and another is that you can easily lose your train of thought when you stop and start at every turn.

Writing fast when you have a deadline is possible even if you have interruptions or a break in your concentration. By considering the importance of the direction of your message and using awareness that attitude wins over perfection, it is very possible to write against the clock.

If you are an unemployed job-seeker and want to learn more writing tips or what a t-bar style cover letter is, contact the Centre for Education & Training at: www.myjobto.com

Whether you are in school and trying to complete an assignment on time, or are an employee trying to write an email before the end of the business day, or are a job-seeker applying for a job, it is possible to learn the secrets to recover from writers block.

Lisa Trudel is a Career Specialist with the Centre for Education & Training, Employment Services. (www.myjobto.com) She can be contacted at: ltrudel@tcet.com

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LEARNING FOR LIFE WITH THE TORONTO DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

BY WENDY LEE SCOTT

At the Toronto District School Board, Continuing Education and General Interest programs, lifelong learning comes in many shapes and sizes. We all know that keeping our minds and bodies active is good for us physically, emotionally and socially. It could be a Zumba class for fitness, a language class for fun or a computer course just to keep in touch with the grandchildren. Learn to decorate a cake the Wilton way, reduce stress with a Tai Chi class, Discover you too can learn French! Is there a skill you need to learn for work? Bank teller training? Office Administration? Chances are we might offer the class you are looking for. We even offer one day workshops for those who cannot or do not want to commit too much time in advance.

Maybe you would like to perfect your writing skills or even start a small business. There is a fabulous, fun and financially feasible way to keep up with your continuing learning needs.

The Toronto District School Board runs many continuing education and general interest programs across the city. From Tai Chi to memoir writing,

there is probably an interesting program running in your community. Many of our programs are beautiful little gems that no one has heard about.

Perhaps you hesitate to sign up for a course for fear of dropping out because of your already busy life. Well, our programs run just one night a week sometimes for only eight weeks in 41 different communities—perhaps in your community! What better way to make a few new friends, while learning a new skill or hobby!

Every year the TDSB Continuing Education department reaches out to various communities with new locations and course offerings. Our programs serve people of all ages and abilities.

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Saturdays there is Burnhamthorpe Collegiate and Overland Learning Centre. There is a location open every night of the week, in many different locations all across the city. In fall, winter, spring and

summer, the TDSB offers courses for your interest and convenience.

To learn more about our programs log on to learn4life.ca or look for our winter brochure in your local library, school or community centre. You can also drop by one of the General

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Sandra Martin, beloved Overland Learning Centre ESL Instructor, received the 2012 Excellence in Teaching Award from Karen Falconer, Superintendent, Continuing Education TDSB at the ESL Week Celebration event held November 8th at Bathurst Heights Adult Learning Centre.



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PERSONAL SUPPORT WORKER: A CAREER IN HEALTHCARE

BY ANNE MCDONAGH

Jocelyn recently graduated as a Personal Support Worker from a community college. She now works for an agency earning about \$15 an hour. She works in the community visiting vulnerable seniors but also younger people with disabilities. She enjoys her work very much and for good reason. Her working life before she took the PSW course was precarious, monotonous and poorly paid.

PSWs can earn between \$12 and \$25 an hour depending who they work for and where. Those working in long-term care facilities make more than those who make home visits.

Even though the pay is not great, there are good reasons why Jocelyn enjoys her work. First of all, she has a lot of freedom and independence as she goes from client to client. When asked if she liked her job. She said that she did. When asked why she said, “Because it’s mine.

Then there is the nice warm feeling people get from helping others. PSWs sometimes have to go beyond the call of duty to comfort and console their clients, who are often at their most vulnerable. The reward for the PSW is that their clients are usually very grateful to their PSW for straightening their beds, making them a cup of tea, or for simply being there.

There is no danger that the job will be automated or off-shored to China. That’s another reason Jocelyn is happy in her work; she feels quite secure in her job. And finally the training could be a stepping stone to a career in healthcare. She herself will probably not go any further, but the possibility is there, and no doubt some of her peers will take advantage of the opportunity

What do PSWs do? They perform routine household chores like cleaning up the kitchen, tidying the living room, running the vacuum, shopping, meal preparation etc. They help clients with daily activities such as bathing, toileting, dressing, personal hygiene etc. They offer friendship and companionship. The skill set is really quite demanding.

They work in hospitals and long-term care facilities. A few entrepreneurs start their own business. Probably most, like Jocelyn, provide home care to elderly people who want to stay in their homes but have some difficulty managing. The PSW helps them stay at home, saving the government quite a bit of money. The PSW will be crucial for the next few decades as government tries to control healthcare spending when the population is aging and using the healthcare system more than ever before.

There are, of course, disadvantages to this work. Clearly, PSWs deserve better pay. Sometimes they encounter difficult patients who require them to use all the tact and people skills they can muster. Also the work can be quite difficult physically; for instance, a person needs to be quite fit to turn clients over in their beds. Someone considering PSW work would need to weigh carefully the advantages against the disadvantages and decide if it is a suitable career for herself or/himself.

PSW courses are offered by community colleges, private career colleges and a couple of school boards. All the colleges in the GTA offer many PSW courses as do most of the career colleges such as Robotech (see advertisement on page 7). To find the career colleges in Toronto and the PSW courses they offer go to www.oacc.on.ca. For the community colleges and school boards, course descriptions and contact people are in the sidebar to this article.

The Personal Support Worker curriculum followed by the various institutions was originally developed by the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care and the Ministry oversees the programs. Courses combine practical skills training with communication, patient care and many techniques that are required in caring for the sick. They study physiology, anatomy and alterations to human mental and physical health as well as practices such as infection control, administering medication and many more. They learn how to deal with a variety of patient types—cognitive disorders, palliative care etc.

Because they often find themselves in the middle of intense emotion on the part of their clients or their families, conflict management and family dynamics are also part of the curriculum. Students have a clinical placement to practice their skills.

There is some concern about the training PSWs receive because unlike most other healthcare workers in Ontario, PSWs are not a regulated health care profession, that is, there is no governing body which sets standards for the skills and knowledge needed to practice as a PSW, and the services they can provide. Rather, PSWs have a role standard which says “personal support workers do for a person the things that the person would do for themselves, if they were physically or cognitively able”.

Whether they get their training at a community college, a career college or a school board, they more or less follow the same curriculum.

At the colleges the course lasts two semesters. At the career colleges it is 26 to 30 weeks. The prerequisites are a Grade 12 diploma or the equivalent including a grade 12 English credit. Fitness and good health are also required. Kindness and the desire to make a difference are probably the most important characteristics of the successful PSW.



COMMUNITY COLLEGES OFFERING PSW COURSES

Centennial College: Morningside Campus
Contact Joy Roumanis, Program Coordinator
Phone 416-289-5303
healthstudies@centennialcollege.ca

Durham College
Contact Melissa Brown, Program Coordinator
Phone 905-721-2000 ext. 7612

George Brown College (full time and part time)
Contact Laura Bulmer, Program Coordinator
Phone 416-415-5000, ext. 3153
lbulmer@georgebrown.ca

Humber College
Contact Donna Skells, Program Co-ordinator
Phone 416.675.6622 ext. 4629 or email donna.skells@humber.ca

Seneca College (full time and part time)
Contact Ann Hersch, Program Coordinator
416-491-5050 ext.22528
ann.hersch@senecacollege.ca

Sheridan College Brampton Campus (full time and part time)
Full time, contact Betty Bruder,

Program Coordinator
Phone 905-459-8626, Ext. 5380
betty.bruder@sheridaninstitute.ca
Part time, contact Sandra Secord, Program Coordinator
Phone 905-459-8626, Ext. 2742
sandra.secord@sheridaninstitute.ca


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Yorkdale Adult Learning Centre
38 Orfus Rd, North York, ON
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Durham Catholic District School Board
Durham Continuing Education
120 Centre Street
Oshawa
Phone 416-436-3211

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Oshawa Campus 905 438-0570 & 905 626-6631
Re-engagement Program - 905 438-0570 Ext. 8448
Ajax Campus 905 682-7713 & 905 626-6631
Whitby Centennial Building Campus ESL & Linc – 289 481-1226
Welcome Centre ESL & Linc - 289-481-1336
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HOW TO ECONOMIZE IN HARD TIMES

BY RUMANA KHALIFA

There is no sign that the cost of living will go down. The poor, who are affected the most, work to survive. I am a single woman who had to learn the trick of surviving at an early age. To survive a person needs to take charge of her money and at the end of the day she is lucky if she is left with some change to treat herself.

Here is how I do it every month: I get my pay cheque every other week. I know exactly what is automatically withdrawn from my account: mortgage, monthly deduction for my RRSP and home insurance. I don't see this money.

Most of what is left pays my utilities and public transit, necessary expenses I have no control over. What I am in control of is my grocery bill.

I receive a weekly flyer at home in which I see the sales for the week on grocery items. I plan what I will cook for the week around these discounted items. It is most important to make a list; I don't go to the store without the list because it helps me to pick the items that I really need for the week. Most important I stick to my list. Even when there are other items I would like, I stop and think do I need it? The list helps me focus on what I need. For example if meat, poultry or fish is on sale I buy more of these items than I need. I cut them in portions and freeze them. Every other week I buy vegetables and fruit. If I find oil or coffee or other such staples on sale, I will stock up. What I buy every week is bread and milk.

Vegetables I buy in Chinatown because they are cheaper there than the vegetables in regular grocery stores and meat I buy from a wholesaler. For example, I bought a large quantity of chicken legs and divided them and the cost with three other families.

I make sure I save enough money to last me for six months if I become unemployed. Then when I was unemployed I planned weekly and prepared food from discounted items. For example I bought day old bread which is in a special place in the supermarket. You just have to ask the counter person.

Whether I was working or not I always put money in my RRSP and I also managed to save a little extra. I talked to a financial counsellor at my bank and asked him if I was able buy a house. We went over my financial position. He told me that I could borrow my RRSP money if I am a first home buyer. That information was welcome and came at the right time. I made an application through the First Home Buyer Plan, and with the RRSP plus the money I had saved I was able to qualify for a loan. I must repay the RRSP within 15 years.

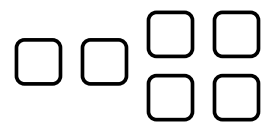
One year after I bought the house I was laid off from my work. Fear and frustration! How can I manage to pay my monthly mortgage? I went to plan B: hosting international students. I managed to host two students at a time and that money paid my mortgage and utilities and the rest of my bills until I got on my feet again.

Eventually I found two jobs, one part-time and one full time, and I managed both. I had made it again!

I had always valued education, and so I enrolled my daughter in an education fund when she was 2 years old with the money that I was receiving monthly for the Child Tax Benefit. I never saw that money; it went directly to the education fund account which I had opened and which the government matched. At the age of 17 when she finished high school and was about to go university there was \$35,000 waiting for her.

I am a middle aged woman, and I find there is always something to learn everyday. I feel I have still more to learn and I am always open to new experiences. I am teaching my daughter to use money wisely and to be aware of the needs and wants of every day life. Also we put any spare change we have in a jar and also encourage friends and other family members to do so. Then we send the money to Africa to help people less fortunate than ourselves and to remind ourselves how lucky we are.

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BROCK UNIVERSITY A PIONEER IN ONLINE LEARNING

By Heather Junke

More than a decade ago, Brock University's Centre for Adult Education and Community Outreach (CAECO) recognized the potential of online learning. They were true pioneers in the creation and development of online programming to meet a demand across Ontario and beyond for Adult Education courses.

There's been an explosion in online learning since those early days with a growing trend toward larger scale online environments. However, CAECO is committed to maintaining the smaller student-focused scale of the online delivery of its Certificate in Adult Education and Bachelor of Education (BEd) in Adult Education programs. That means new students will continue to benefit from the experience of online classes of no more than 23 students.

"Online learning is a question of scale," says Dr. Sharon Abbey, CAECO director. "We focus on small classes that allow individual attention. Our distinction is that we draw strength in class sizes that promote a sense of community among learners."

"Our course facilitators are able to get to know their students, to know the work that their students do and to provide individualized attention along the way. We have built in opportunities for students to communicate with one another in their online cohort group."

CAECO also has taken its online experience further with the development of an online environment specifically for its corps of facilitators who bring their professional experience and demonstrated academic credentials to teach Brock's adult learners. Each term between 40 and 48 facilitators, under the supervision of faculty, lead Brock's Adult Education courses online or in person.

Contact North, Ontario's distance education and training network, recently showcased the CAECO facilitator online environment as part of its "Pockets of Innovation" website.

In an article posted on Contact North's website, Brock's Adult Education online facilitator environment was described as "an indispensable innovation that serves as a learning network for a community of practice which is essential to the unique staffing and curricular structure of the adult education programs. Student learning is enhanced as all facilitators have access to the wide range of experience and perspectives of their colleagues, which augments their breadth of knowledge and teaching ability."

"We've embraced online learning from all perspectives with an awareness that scale matters," says Abbey. "The online experience for our facilitators and students, one that retains community and involves a high level of interactivity, will continue to be a priority."

Andrew Han credits Brock's facilitator environment with enriching his experience in teaching the ADED online courses since 2010. "After I began facilitating online, I learned the necessity of collaborating and communicating with fellow facilitators in the online forums set up for that purpose," says Han who is based in Edmonton, Alta. "For online facilitators it is the interaction with colleagues — the exchange of ideas and suggestions to improve the student learning experience — that is a main source of growth and transformation."

Han also turns to insight he has gained through Stephen Brookfield's *The Skillful Teacher* (2006). "What I took from Brookfield was the importance of feedback for learners, especially for online learners because of their physical isolation. We need to be transparent about our assumptions about teaching and learning so that students can understand the reasoning behind our decisions," he says.

Brock University is located in St. Catharines, Ont. The Centre for Adult Education and Community Outreach offers a Bachelor of Education in Adult Education degree program and a Certificate in Adult Education program in online delivery and site-based delivery at venues across Ontario including the GTA. Find out more by visiting <http://brocku.ca/education/futurestudents/adulted>

DEAR ELCEE



**Dear Elcee is a feature in every issue of Learning Curves. Send your questions about education, training, careers, jobs to: Elcee
The WEA of Canada
157 Carlton Street, Suite 205
Toronto, On M5A 2K2**

I need some help! I have been looking for work for some time now and keep getting different advice everywhere I go. Some people tell me to volunteer. Others say I should register with employment agencies. I have been told to only apply online and then get told I should go in person. What way is the right way?

Confused in Caledonia

Well, the simple answer is ... they are all right... and they are all wrong. Confused? I bet. In a job search there is no one right answer. The best job search is a combination of all the above. Let me break it down for you...

Volunteering – getting out there and getting involved in a charitable organization has many benefits. Helping others has a beneficial effect psychologically. I encourage most people to try to volunteer in an area where they are looking for work to keep their skills up to date and gain references. I call it "strategic" volunteering. Keep in mind however that many non-profits do want a commitment of at least a year and would be highly unlikely to give you a reference until they get to know you and your work.

Employment Agencies – Yes, employment agencies do make money off you. They should. Money is spent in advertising and gaining and maintaining clients. What is great about working "temp" is that you get a chance to go into a company and show off your skills. You get to see what you may like about working for a certain type of industry and experience many types of company "cultures" (how they do business). You also get to earn money while you are doing it which is always welcome. Some companies also hire on a "temp to perm" basis which means if they really like you they may pay a fee to hire you permanently.

Applying Online – Many, many companies now recruit almost exclusively online. You have to go to that company's website, register, and complete an online application and submit your resume and/or cover letter. Some companies may even put you through a screening, which may seem very much like a personality test, except you won't get the results. One tip. Do not be self-effacing on these questions. Confidence is key.

In Person – Yes, in person is still an option in job search – for SOME companies. Many employers such as privately owned restaurants or retail operations still will accept in person applications. This is a chance for you to show off some of those great customer service skills. If you are going in person, keep these points in mind:

Go during off-peak hours. Don't visit a busy restaurant during a lunch (11:30 – 2:30) or dinner (4:30 – 7:30) rush.

Please go dressed professionally with extra copies of your resume on hand.

Remember to take the name of the person you spoke with and follow up with a thank you.

By using all of the above in your job search you may reach your goal faster. In my many, many years in the work force I have obtained work from each of these methods (yes, even "temp to perm"). So what methods work best? The one that gets you that job in the end. Good luck.



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MEDICAL OFFICE ASSISTANT- A GOOD EDUCATIONAL INVESTMENT

By Wendy Terry

In September while I was attending a graduation event for Access Business College (See advertisement on back page), Sonia Nerses, the Executive Director spoke to me about the value of a Medical Office Assistant certificate for today's labour market.

What do Medical Office Assistants do? They used to be called Medical Secretaries, and they are the first people you speak to when you enter a doctor's office, a medical lab, a clinic or a health care facility. They often call you to remind you of an appointment or give the dates and times for a referral to a specialist. They will have found your medical records for the doctor before your appointment. They make sure the charges get billed to OHIP or an insurance company.

What do they need to know? They need to be knowledgeable about basic medical terminology and specialized

computer programs for logging in appointments, billing OHIP or insurance companies, and maintaining the health care records of patients.

What are the elements of the job? Medical Office Assistants keep regular work hours in an office setting. Entry level pay is \$15 to \$18 an hour. You can use this position to move into other areas of health care like Medical Records or Transcription in hospitals, long-term care facilities, OHIP itself or a health insurance companies. Given that the baby boomers (almost a quarter of the population) are moving into their senior years and will

spend a lot of their time on medical problems, you can expect the job opportunities to grow in this area.

Sonia, herself a nurse, is now dedicated to helping her students find work through Access Business College. She is wizard at helping students find funding through Second Career and other programs. While researching jobs and training for your employment counselor, consider training as a Medical Office Assistant. As Sonia says, it's a good educational investment.

GOING AHEAD WITH DISTANCE ED

Joanne Mackay-Bennett

Most of us have heard about distance education, but we may be less clear about how it works. A decision about whether to enroll in a university course that takes place via a computer often comes down to a series of pluses and minuses. For some, in-class teaching is irreplaceable; for others, the practical benefits of taking a course without having to be physically present in a classroom outweigh any loss of face-to-face interaction. But what if we stopped comparing? If we considered distance ed as a different kind of teaching tool, one with unique teaching and learning capabilities that were never intended to be in competition with those associated with classroom teaching?

The four Canadian universities that I mention here have done just that. Their policies make distance ed work for adult learners. Athabasca, Carleton, Laurentian and Nipissing are members of Canadian Virtual University, an association of 12 universities in Canada that offer online and distance education (www.cvu-uvic.ca). The keyword for these distance ed providers? Flexibility!

When I spoke to an information counselor at Athabasca University, I was amazed by the simplicity of the admission process. (The counselor's grasp of policy certainly helped). The most important thing to know about AU is that it is one of two open universities in Canada (Thompson Rivers University is the other one). That means that there is no on-campus student population, no formal admission requirements, and no semester system. Students can register any time for a single course or more.

At Athabasca, distance ed works one of two ways – either as an online individualized course, or, for those who do not have access to a computer, as a 'paper' (delivered by mail) course of individualized study. It is also possible to sign up for one course (with permission) while you are registered at another university.

All you need to do is register on the 10th of the month previous to your start date, pay the course fee plus a one-time, non-refundable, registration fee of \$115.00. That registration fee is good for life, by the way. In other words, if you enroll as an 'unclassified visiting student' this year, and take another course three years from now, your AU registration fee is still good.

Like most universities, Carleton University offers both classroom teaching and distance ed. Their distance ed component is handled through Carleton University Online (www2.carleton.ca/cuol/). Administrative associate, Maria Brocklehurst (a superb information resource), assured me that whether you are interested in taking a single course for personal interest, to qualify for admission, or to improve your professional qualifications, you can register as a special student. "Anyone who is interested in pursuing learning opportunities," Ms. Brocklehurst emphasized, "is eligible to apply as a Special Student in degree-credit courses." In that case, fees are paid on a per credit basis. Another plus to keep in mind is that many courses have no prerequisites.

At Carleton, distance ed courses are

recorded during an on-campus lecture, including questions and discussion, and then posted online. By simulating the 'live' classroom experience, CUOL lessens the isolation that is part and parcel of distance education.

Laurentian University's distance ed program, part of the Centre for Continuing Education (CCE), has grown from its initial offering of one course in 1972 to its present tally of over 360 courses offered in an online format (cce_L@laurentian.ca). Laurentian is Canada's largest provider of bilingual (French-English) education. Acceptance into a degree or certificate program is necessary before registering in a distance ed program but admission can be based on a combination of educational and practical experience.

A mid-sized university, Laurentian takes the time to address more than formal policy requirements. Their interest in the 'who' not just the 'what' of distance ed (understanding yourself as a student, learning style, motivation, the importance of character, etc.), recognizes some of the emotional hurdles that distance learners may face.

Nipissing University has made great strides in striking a balance between online and classroom learning. Its Centre for Flexible Teaching and Learning (CFTL) stresses the compatibility between classroom and online learning rather than the differences. By making "engaged learning" its goal, Nipissing's CFTL narrows the gap that often polarizes the distance ed debate.

Dr. Lorraine Carter, CFTL's very

welcoming Academic Director, spoke to me about Nipissing's effort to make meaningful exchange—which, after all, lies at the heart of student-teacher relationships—integral to distance ed. She pointed out the important personal connection that a smaller university like Nipissing can provide. From the registration process to assignments, students are able to stay personally connected in a way that is often more difficult at a larger university.

Two of Nipissing's distance ed programs are unique in Canada: the Business Diploma -Bachelor of Commerce Program and the Registered Practical Nurse - Bachelor of Science (Nursing) Program. Both offer innovative opportunities for distance learners. Students with a three-year College business diploma, for instance, can stay at the college campus while enrolled in the Bachelor of Commerce degree. Similarly, the RPN-B.ScN Blended Program allows current RPN's to study part-time towards their degree while working. Practicum-based courses are offered either within the health care agency where the student is employed or through Nipissing's partner agencies.

These four members of Canadian Virtual University are committed to the practical benefits of distance ed. What's more, all of the people who communicated with me were as open, flexible and accessible as the distance ed programs that they advocate. Let me encourage you to explore the numerous possibilities of distance education with these three words: Go for it!

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