

Re-Entering the Workforce Can be a Job in Itself

BY SALLY BAIR
Staff Correspondent

LEBANON — "Looking for a job may be the hardest job you ever had." This somewhat startling information set the tone for a four-hour seminar intended to help homemakers who are considering re-entering the workforce. Seventy women attended the program sponsored by the Lebanon County Cooperative Extension Service, the Mental Health Association, and Mental Health/Mental Retardation in cooperation with Potential Re-entry Opportunities in Business and Education (PROBE).

The homemakers represented a wide range of ages, interests and backgrounds, but staff members from PROBE offered advice that was pertinent to anyone considering looking for a job, either volunteer or paid.

Dorothy Hershey, project associate for PROBE, pointed out that no matter what the reason for re-entering the work force, women face the same fears. They wonder what kind of work they can do, they frequently don't know what they want to do, and they don't know what's available.

Dorothy made it clear that the advice she was giving was not intended just for women who want or need paying jobs. She said, "We refer to any kind of work and that does not mean it needs to be tied to a paycheck. All work is important."

To assess their abilities and to know which job may be right for them, Dorothy told the women their first step should be an "inward search," beginning with reaching an understanding as to what your motivation is for working.

"Motivation will affect the way you look for work and also the ultimate success in getting a job and keeping one," she said.

She acknowledged that if money is the over-riding factor in searching for a job, a woman may not have as much time to search for the perfect job.

And despite what people may believe, it is money that is the primary reason most women seek work, Dorothy noted.

Learning your strengths is the next part of the inward search. Dorothy said that many women are stymied by this one, and added, "If you don't know your strengths, ask someone else what they are."

Interests should also be considered, another area which is often difficult for women to express. Often a woman's interests are linked directly to the family's interests. Dorothy said jokingly, "I don't know a single woman who actually likes to go tent camping."

She advised, "Think about the

things you enjoy doing, and accomplishments that make you feel good. What would you do if you had time."

Often, she said volunteer work may provide a clue to your interests.

Another important consideration is skills. Dorothy said this often strikes terror in women when it is mentioned, but she assured those women present that everyone has a skill.

Linda Crosson, counselor for PROBE, told the women to employ a little creative thinking when listing skills to find definite skills which may not come readily to mind. She urged them to list physical skills, mental skills, creative skills, leadership skills and helping skills. Analyzing past experience can help in making the skills list.

Understanding your needs is another important part of the inward search. Temperament and personality traits should be considered, and will help you avoid finding the wrong job.

Needs include the understanding of family responsibilities.

"If you have young children, you need to make child care arrangements long before getting a job," Dorothy told the group.

She said making those arrangements will also help you know what financial obligations you'll have to help decide if the job is worthwhile.

"If you get a job outside home, your life will change. Your daily life patterns change," Dorothy noted. This change in lifestyle must be considered as part of the inward search.

A positive attitude is one of the primary requirements throughout the job search, and the advice the women provided here will boost a woman even if she doesn't want to change her job. Linda pointed out, "How we perceive ourselves and our skills will be what we communicate to others. Since we often identify ourselves by the roles assigned to us by others (wives, mothers, daughters, volunteers) we often lose sight of being a person in our own right."

"You must be able to say good things about yourself in a positive way. If we feel good about ourselves we feel we can ask for respect."

She urged the women to be assertive, but since that often carries a negative connotation, she provided this definition: "Assertion is self-expression through which one stands up for one's basic rights without violating the basic rights of others." Linda adds, "You can't be aggressive, assertive or passive."

An important step in finding the right job is an "outward search," which includes visiting the



Dorothy Hershey, left, and Linda Crosson, discuss their experience with Potential Re-entry Opportunities in Business and Education (PROBE) and offer specific advice garnered in the organization's six year history.



Dorothy talks with Cindy Smith of Adams County about the work that PROBE does and the service it offers.

library, calling the chamber of commerce, reading want ads and calling local job service offices. Linda cautioned, "Seventy-five percent of job openings are never listed in the newspaper."

Practical guidelines were offered on preparing resumes. Linda said a chronological resume may work to the disadvantage of a woman who has been out of the job market for several years. There is also a functional resume which emphasizes work related skills, or a combination of the two. When

writing it, Linda said, "Highlight what you do for what you want. The written word gets you the opportunity of getting there in person."

The personal interview is very important, and Linda advised doing homework about the company and also be prepared by thinking the kinds of questions you could be asked and being prepared to handle them.

Both women advised carrying a positive attitude throughout the search, and Linda concluded,

"You are marketing yourself. You are a product you are selling."

PROBE is operated with a grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Education, with The Pennsylvania State University providing matching funds with office space and facilities. PROBE is headquartered at the Middletown campus of Penn State, and concentrates in a four-county area in central Pennsylvania. Their services are available free of charge for those considering a re-entry into the workplace.



Linda Crosson discusses a specific problem with one of the seventy homemakers who attended the seminar last week.

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