

COMMENTARY

Get off your ass, sir



rogerWILLIAMS

rwilliams@floridaweekly.com

Do you have a good job?
That's nice.
Are you "self-made?"
Cool, baby.

Who are you working for — yourself? A business (is it big or little)? Do you have a government job?

You have friends at work, I take it, or at the very least friendly acquaintances. So you know somebody. If you're the owner or a senior manager, you know everybody, or at least everybody who counts, as they say. Right?

Well, let me be as polite about this as I can: Get off your ass, sir. Move your tail, ma'am. It's time to help somebody. Somebody else, that is. Just pretend it's a family member, and put some effort into it, will you?

Put this paper down, in other words, and put your shoulder to the wheel.

Somehow, somehow, you have to give somebody a shot — somebody who doesn't have what you have right now.

Isn't that what Americans do in hard times, they help each other? I've been told that, and in my experience it's often been true.

In other words, quit glancing at these stories about the wing-and-a-prayer economy and shaking your head, and help a fellow American find work. And don't start that negative BS about how you can't, or you're not in a position to. Of course you can.

Because right now, there are roughly 25,000 people in Lee County who don't have work,

about 99 percent of them with families. And the pain those people feel is becoming way too evident. But I'm not

interested in them as a group.

And right now the unemployment rate in the county is most likely running higher than 8.4 percent, where it was six weeks ago. So we're getting up near 10 percent. And you know what? I don't care about that statistic, either. And I don't care if George W. Bush did it, or God did it, or Bad Luck is the responsible SOB. I couldn't care less who did it.

What I do care about is what I can do about it, and what you can do about it. And I won't take it kindly — nor should you — if a fellow American with a good gig is sitting on his lazy ass, and not trying somehow somehow to find somebody a shot at decent work — somebody who wants to work like hell, and has either no gig or not a very good gig.

I know somebody like that. His name's Dan Grayshack. He doesn't spell it Grayshack, he spells it the way any hard-working son of Polish descent from Chicago spells it: Grzesiak. I'm related to him, sort of, which is why I got to know him — he's the brother of my own brother-in-law.

Dan is actually working now on a golf course at Stoneybrook — just because he can't not hustle.

But what he's trying to do, based on years of experience and owning his own business (16 rental units in Michigan, which he bought, managed and sold to move to Florida just over two years ago) is become somebody's property manager.

His resume is impressive: In addition to his own, he's built businesses in the North by millions of dollars, for other people. He's worked every side of property management the way old-time cowhands (the smart ones) could work every side of a ranch, from buying and

selling cows, to running them, to managing the grass and water right, to riding and branding and smithing.

If you have this guy on your side, you're going to get a 100 percent effort all the time, an effort that comes with huge experience and a lot of smarts. I say so, because I know him (you can ask for his resume by writing him at Grzesiakdan@yahoo.com, and decide for yourself).

This is just one guy, but that's what I want you to do — to find one person who needs work (or better work) and vouch for him or her.

I want you to be interested in just one or two people who have less than you right now, too.

I want you to step outside the normal parameters of resume or expectation (politically correct expectation or socially correct expectation, either one). I want you to quit muttering that ridiculous do-nothing mantra that falls short of a prayer and won't even buy your brother a cup of coffee. You know the one: "I hope the economy gets better."

Instead of wasting your breath, I want you to go try to get somebody a job. Maybe not the perfect job, maybe not the job that their experience indicates they want or need, maybe not a job you have defined yet. But a job, with an employer who says, "I need something done, I can pay for it, and maybe this hard-charger can do it well."

If you're reading this paper, there's a very good chance you could actually accomplish this for one person, if you got up off your rear and put your heart in gear.

And that's what I'm talking about. What if every one of you found just one person you could vouch for? Well, the whole economy would spin around like an angry cow and come back the other way, full of mean and muscle.

But back to the statistics.

In 1990, the population of Lee County had jumped by 130,000 in 10 years, to a whopping 335,000 people or so. In January of that year, there were 6,000 unemployed. But by January of '92, about 13,425 were staggering around without work.

Those were tough times here on the Gulf Coast, but they got easier. Year by year, while the population of Lee County increased, the number of those who couldn't find work went down and stayed down. Those figures hovered between about 10,000 or 11,000 at most, and maybe 7,000 to 8,000, depending on the year.

Then along came the early years of this decade. At Christmas in 2005, with about 545,000 Lee County residents, only 6,976 were listed as unemployed. Notice I'm not giving you percentages? That's because every one of them is a person.

And that was about the time Dan Grzesiak came to Florida (he moved into the Clearwater area, first).

Dan avoided becoming one of those numbers only because he works when he can, at whatever he can. But now he's hovering on the edge of the numbers. Here's what he told me:

"In 2.5 years I've sent out 310 resumes in my field. I get them back, or somebody tells me I'm way overqualified. But a lot of the time I got dressed, I showered, I drove there, and I said, 'I want to talk to you, I want to work.'"

"I have too much education and background to be doing what I'm doing (helping to manage a golf course), but that's the opportunity now. You can either sit at home and complain, or go get something. I'm trying to show people that I can work. And you know what? I'm still optimistic. Somebody is going to see me hustling, and figure they need me."

How about you? ■

(NOTE: Figures come from the Florida Agency for Workforce Innovation, and the U.S. Census Bureau.)

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