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I Give Booster Shots for Careers

## My Job

*Written With Ellen Rapp*

I never believe anyone's situation is hopeless. The most dramatic case was a woman who hadn't worked in two years. She'd had a high-level position in financial services. But there was a scandal involving sexually oriented email, and she was fired. The story spread, and she was blacklisted.

I encouraged her to be forthcoming about her situation. We developed a script for interviews: "Look, I made a mistake, and I can understand your concern. But I am completely committed to my profession, and I can promise this won't happen again."

It worked: she got a job with a big firm. Another client did consulting work for nonprofit groups and rarely charged for his work. The year he came to me, he made only \$500. After a few months, he got a fund-raising job paying \$50,000. He hadn't realized he could get paid real money for his skills; it was an epiphany for him.

I don't believe anyone should lie about their career history. But it's O.K. to play with titles. For instance, one client was a librarian, earning \$27,000. I suggested he reposition himself as an information-management specialist. He now makes over \$100,000 at a consulting firm.

Sometimes I'll get a mushy note from a client. A woman in her 60's was bitter because she hadn't worked in five years. She challenged everything I told her. I asked her to make a list of all the negative things she told herself in a week: she came in with over a dozen pages. It made her see, in black and white, what was going on in her head. After a year, she had a consulting position and she adores me now.

I've see a few couples. Usually, the woman in making more money than her husband and they're both unhappy. One woman was earning three times what her husband was. I helped him find a job that doubled his salary. His wife and I decided she would scale back to part time. She left work to have a child. Things became balanced.

I also coach corporate clients. One company called me about a powerful executive who was leaving his co-workers voice mails at 3 a.m. They said, "We want to keep him, but he's spinning out of control." Some staff members thought he had attention-deficit disorder, but he didn't; he was just overburdened. I got him to stop saying yes to every assignment. He started working out a gym to relieve his nervousness. The perception of him at the office changed drastically.

Some people are so devastated to learn what their co-workers think of them they leave the company. Sometimes the best you can do is help them make a successful exit.