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## In Trying Times, Many Ways To Ask, Will You Hire Me?

By CHRISTOPHER S. STEWART

**J**OBLESS for two years now, Michael Walker has sent out roughly 2,400 résumés, gone on 18 interviews with no offers and drained both his savings account and his 401(k). "I have a standing offer that I'll pay \$2,000 cash to the person who refers me to a full-time job," said Mr. Walker, a software engineer from Seattle who is in his 40's.

Before being laid off, Mr. Walker worked for Honeywell and made \$105,000 a year; now he is applying for internships, offering his 22 years of professional experience free. So far, there have been no takers. "I'm seriously considering standing by the freeway off-ramp with a sandwich board that says 'Software Engineer Wants Job — Will Work Cheap,'" he said. "It would be a long shot, but at this point I have nothing left to lose."

Desperation appears to be the order of the day, with unemployment at a nine-year high. About 25 percent of the nine million Americans counted as unemployed have been out of work for more than 27 weeks, according to the Department of Labor. In some of the hardest-hit industries, like technology, finance and manufacturing, many white-collar workers have been out of work

two years or and more.

"These times are rife with the temptation to do extreme things," said Andrew Sherwood, chairman of the human resources firm Goodrich & Sherwood Associates, which is based in New York. "More and more, necessity is a driver. Job seekers have moved from the cocky 'buy me if you like' approach of the 90's to doing and saying whatever it takes to get a job."

The hard-knocks atmosphere has led DiMassimo Brand Consultancy, a New York City advertising firm, to conjure up a job competition styled after the "Survivor" reality TV show. Starting Sept. 15, 10 contestants, all eager for an entry-level job at the agency, will move into DiMassimo's Madison Avenue office, which will be renamed DiMassimo Island for the occasion.

Over several days, they will compete in a range of advertising-related tasks, including an "all-nighter" to put together an ad proposal and make attempts to get a meeting with the chief executive of a company whose account DiMassimo has been trying to land. DiMassimo executives will vote contestants off the island every night until they have a winner. The last person standing earns the entry-level position, with an initial

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Ruby Washington/The New York Times

Stephan Schiffman of DEI Management, a sales training company, has had job applicants stake out his office for an interview, or simply pretend they had been hired.

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salary of \$25,000 to \$30,000.

Marc DiMassimo, chief executive and creative director of the company, said that the competition, which starts in September, reflects the current job market. "It's tough out there," he said. "And this is a time to break rules.

"We're not going to denigrate or degrade people. But somebody else's idea of humiliation isn't the same as mine. If anything, the challenge makes for an interesting way to spend a week trying to get a job. And, hopefully, the contestants will get some attention for it."

Karine Ng, 23, said she had sent out about 50 résumés in the last three months with no response. She is an applicant for the DiMassimo job. "It would be a pretty unique way to get a position," she said. "In these creative industries, a lot of people intern. I just think of this as an intensive weeklong internship with a slumber party excursion thrown in."

Certainly there are many job seekers willing to do whatever it takes to land a position, even if it means losing a little dignity. People in positions to hire say a growing number of applicants are using oddball tactics to attract attention.

Stephan Schiffman did not even have a position open when a Washington man recently showed up without warning at his Manhattan sales training company, the DEI Management Group. Though the man was denied entry, he refused to leave the downstairs lobby, where he waited for the next two hours, even after security was called. In the end, Mr.

Schiffman saw the man to appease him.

"He claimed he wanted to talk about a book that I'd written, but he ended up begging for a job," Mr. Schiffman recalled. "He was completely wired, bouncing off the walls. Even if we'd had something available, he wasn't qualified."

Another man, after being turned down for a position at DEI's Huntington Beach, Calif., office, came to work anyway. "He hired himself," Mr. Schiffman said. "Some of the managers were away after the interview and the people just assumed

## Stalking a job can show commitment, but usually fails.

that he'd gotten the job." Like everyone else working there, he came and went from 9 to 5, spending a total of a week or so blending into the ordinary rhythms of office life before he was finally discovered and asked to leave.

Steven D. Austin, chief marketing officer of Zacks Investment Research in Chicago, said he had recently seen a significant uptick in unusual job hunting tactics. Earlier this year, he was interviewing a man for a sales job when the applicant produced a handful of articles that he said had been written about him in various financial trade publications. As an added gesture, he included a few pictures of himself with well-

known executives like Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg of New York. "The guy definitely wanted me to know he was an accomplished stud," Mr. Austin said.

But when Mr. Austin went to the library to check up on the applicant, he found that not one story had actually been written about the man. As for the pictures, Mr. Austin said, "For all I know, he probably walked up to Bloomberg and asked to pose with him."

Experts warn against approaches that are too unorthodox. "When thinking in extremes, you immediately narrow the window of opportunity," said Damian Birkel, founder of Professionals in Transition Support Group Inc., a nonprofit organization in Winston-Salem, N.C., that assists laid-off workers.

Last March, Mr. Birkel met a woman who had arrived at an interview carrying a pot of shamrocks and her résumé taped to a dozen balloons. It was St. Patrick's Day — but her gesture did not resonate.

Still, every so often, an extreme gambit works. "Sometimes, I sympathize with desperate people," Mr. Schiffman said. "Some of them are hungrier and more motivated than others. And I think 'let's give the guy a break.'"

That is what Mr. Walker is hoping for. He has the enthusiasm and the experience. But he has yet to find a responsive employer, and his failure to land a job is forcing him to consider the sale of his home. "This is really turning into a problem," Mr. Walker said. "The last six months, I've become really desperate. If there's a moral here, I haven't found it yet."