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Bringing Work to Life

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## Welcome

Welcome to this quarterly issue of Bringing Work to Life. We are pleased that our latest book, *How to Build a Nontraditional Career Path: Embracing Economic Disruption*, (Praeger, 2014) is being well received. In addition to many purchases by individuals, the book is already available through more than 400 libraries in the United States and across the world. Here is a recent review of the book:

<http://www.elsdon.com/Page27.html>. Our book describes why, when, and how to create an inspiring and practical nontraditional career path from more than one source of income: <http://www.abc-clio.com/product.aspx?isbn=9781440831584>

It complements our three existing books:

*Business Behaving Well: Social Responsibility, from Learning to Doing*, (Potomac Books, Inc., 2013) that provides a rationale and roadmap for organizations to incorporate socially responsible practices, building on principles of social justice:

<http://www.nebraskapress.unl.edu/product/Business-Behaving-Well,676586.aspx>

*Building Workforce Strength: Creating Value through Workforce and Career Development* (Praeger, 2010) that describes the application of workforce and career development principles and practices to strengthen organizations:

<http://www.abc-clio.com/ABC-CLIOCorporate/product.aspx?pc=C3236C>

and *Affiliation in the Workplace: Value Creation in the New Organization* (Praeger, 2003) that describes leadership approaches to integrate the needs of the individual with the needs of the organization for the benefit of both:

<http://www.abc-clio.com/product.aspx?isbn=9781567204360>

This newsletter contains two articles: Supporting a Nontraditional Career Path, and Workforce Trends.



Ron Elsdon, Ph.D., is founder of *Elsdon Organizational Renewal*, which focuses on supporting organizations enhance effectiveness through revitalized workforce relationships and leadership practices. Prior to establishing his practice, Ron held senior leadership positions at diverse organizations. Ron is also co-founder of New Beginnings Career and College Guidance, which provides caring and personalized help to individuals and families in career guidance, coaching and college planning.

Ron is author of *How to Build a Nontraditional Career Path: Embracing Economic Disruption*, which describes why, when and how to create an inspiring and practical nontraditional career path from more than one source of income; editor of *Business Behaving Well: Social Responsibility, from Learning to Doing*, which provides a rationale and roadmap for organizations

## Supporting a Nontraditional Career Path

Scott Adams, the creator of “Dilbert,” tells a story of his early days seeking a publisher for his work (<http://www.toonmaker.com/a-kind-word.htm>). At that time he sent a sample of his work to Jack Cassady, the cartoonist host of a PBS television program called *Funny Business*, to ask advice about how to enter the profession. He received a complimentary letter back with details about how to proceed, encouragement to seek a publisher and advice not to be discouraged by the rejection he might receive. Buoyed by this, Adams recounts how he submitted his best cartoons to *Playboy* and *The New Yorker* only to receive cold rejections. He put away his materials at this point and decided to forget about cartooning. About a year and a half later, Adams received a letter from Jack Cassady unexpectedly. In it Cassady inquired about Adams’ progress and again encouraged him to press forward. Adams recounts how this kind word touched him, since he hadn’t even replied to the first letter. He pulled his materials out of storage and prepared samples of what would later become “Dilbert” and submitted his work again. It was accepted and “Dilbert” was born, now to be read by millions. Jack Cassady’s actions were selfless here. He had nothing to gain from Adams’ support, was a busy man, and yet found time to support a struggling new artist. He demonstrated the selfless act of mentoring at its best, and as a result helped bring a new talent to the world. This one act of kindness created a ripple effect from which many benefit today.

I recall an incident from my teenage years. I had been volunteered as a member of a swimming team for an intramural event in the English equivalent of an American high school. Swimming was not my strength; in fact I was hopeless at it but had to participate. The event took place on a Saturday night in a pool with quite a few cheering (and jeering) spectators. It came to my event. Four of us were competing. It involved four laps of the pool and predictably by the end I was in last place, a full half-length behind the third-placed participant. I finally arrived at the finish point, too exhausted to even pull myself out of the pool. I was expecting a searing criticism, for that was common in that school. Then something unusual happened. The team coach, an older boy, helped pull me out of the water. He looked at me and said: “Well done, we really appreciate your efforts. Thank you.” I was too shocked by these few words of kindness to say anything, but they have remained with me for almost fifty years. I have forgotten the many small slights and put-downs, those acts that diminish rather than elevate. But I have not forgotten the brave words of that coach.

These are examples of support. Support that enables and ennobles. It comes from the same place as Carl Rogers’ unconditional positive regard. Support focuses on an individual need that may be clearly explained or alternatively may be unspoken but no less deeply felt. Support is instrumental in enabling the gifts that we all possess to become present for the world. It recognizes that our lives are interdependent and that this interdependence is a strength on which to build. Let us look at what support means in the context of a nontraditional career path, examining three potentially supportive groups: family and friends, customers, and a current employer. (As pointed out in our first quarter 2015 newsletter, by a nontraditional career path we mean one that is tailored to our individual needs and contains more than one source of income.)

to incorporate socially responsible practices, building on real-world examples from contributing authors, and principles of social justice; editor of *Building Workforce Strength: Creating Value through Workforce and Career Development*, a book that describes the application of workforce and career development principles and practices to strengthen organizations; and author of *Affiliation in the Workplace: Value Creation in the New Organization*, a book describing leadership approaches to integrate the needs of the individual with the needs of the organization for the benefit of both. Ron holds a Ph.D. from Cambridge University in chemical engineering, an M.A. from John F. Kennedy University in career development and a first class honors degree from Leeds University in chemical engineering. With his co-author he was awarded the Walker Prize by the Human Resource Planning Society for the paper that best advances state-of-the-art thinking or practices in human resources.

*Family and friends.* Bringing family members early into a decision to pursue a nontraditional career lets them understand the rationale and be present to offer practical support and affirmation. This might mean being available for conversations about decisions and helping make practical aspects like working from home feasible. Family and friends are those most likely to provide unconditional support. My wife's support was critical when we began our first practice, in terms of both her expertise in a complementary area of practice delivery and her patience during my earlier educational activities while I was also working full time. It was critical later, when deciding to embrace organizational consulting as an additional component. Such support is important whether the approach is instantaneous immersion, which can significantly affect others quickly, or gradual engagement, where patience and perseverance are important. Family and friends can help accelerate the pace of entry by providing affirmation, encouragement, and practical support.

*Customers.* It might seem strange to include customers when considering support. After all, isn't our relationship with a customer simply that of being a supplier? In fact, strong customer relationships speak to shared values and mutual benefit. Such customer relationships can profoundly influence the pace of entry, leading to the purchase of products or services at an early nontraditional career stage when such support is vital, and by providing encouragement. Customers can also offer valuable insights into product or service offerings during formative stages. These insights in turn accelerate the pace of entry. In starting the organizational consulting component of my nontraditional career, several customers with whom I had extended prior relationships as a supplier, were most helpful. This included purchasing services and, in one case, providing insights about launching. Customer support directly affects income generation, which accelerates growth, and is indirectly beneficial in providing product or service insights that translate into accelerated entry.

*Current employer.* Removing as many impediments as possible is important in the formative stage of a nontraditional career. Such impediments can include restrictions on the ability to operate in certain content areas or to work with certain customers. A current employer may seek to impose such restrictions if permitted by local law and if the nontraditional career direction is seen as a competitive threat. On the other hand, a supportive current employer will not limit areas of practice and will encourage use of personal intellectual capital that in turn can accelerate pace of entry. This will most likely happen when nontraditional career components do not compete with a current employer's business. I was fortunate, when moving forward with an organizational consulting practice, that this did not compete with the employer's evolving direction and therefore I was able to proceed without impediments and with support. This helped accelerate my pace of entry.

Support means giving to others. In a nontraditional career path this can include volunteer activities. In my case volunteer work, has included a number of activities over the years. Whether volunteering as an ambassador for our local food bank, assisting in national hunger surveys, making presentations on social justice issues such as universal health care, providing interview coaching at local educational institutions, providing career services at a local prison for those approaching re-entry, acting as a resource for public sector career web site review, or guiding volunteer teams delivering human resource services in nonprofit organizations,

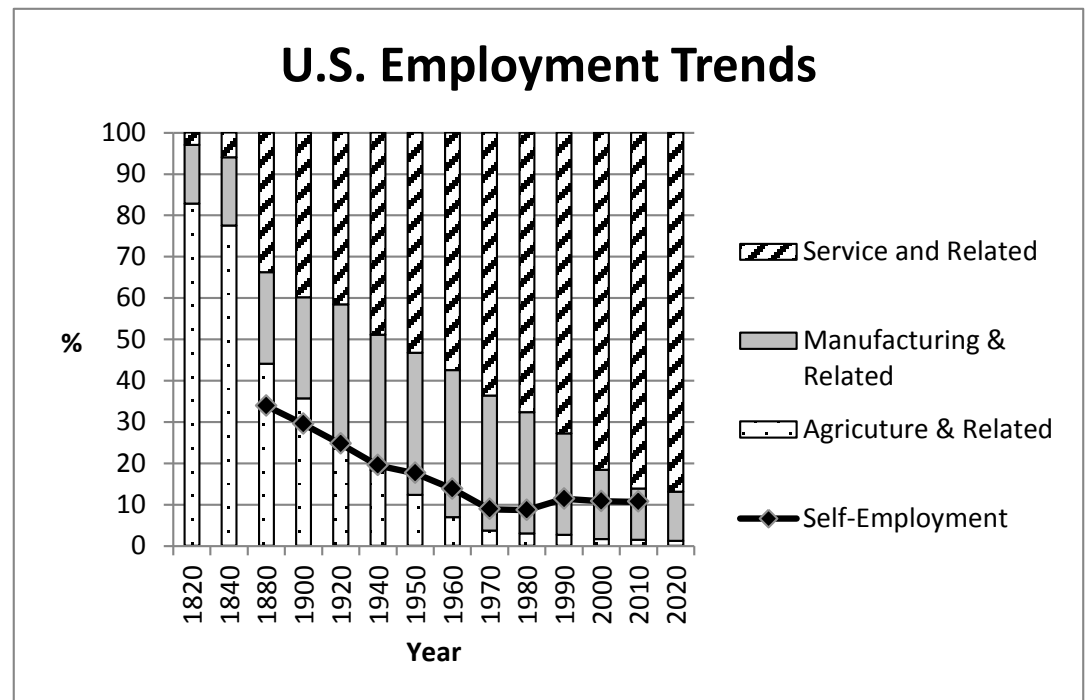
volunteer work has been a meaningful part of my nontraditional career. It allowed me to bring knowledge and skills from other areas into settings where they could be helpful, and I am grateful for these opportunities, though cognizant that I could and should have done much more.

Support brings benefit to others, to our communities and to each of us. It is one way we can assist those with economic disadvantages. It is one way we experience grace through giving and receiving.

Parts of this article are extracted from *How to Build a Nontraditional Career Path: Embracing Economic Disruption*, Ron Elsdon (Praeger, 2014), and from *Affiliation in the Workplace: Value Creation in the New Organization*, Ron Elsdon (Praeger, 2003).

## Workforce Trends

The following figure from *How to Build a Nontraditional Career Path* provides insights into U.S. sector and self-employment trends.



Source: *How to Build a Nontraditional Career Path: Embracing Economic Disruption*, Ron Elsdon (Praeger, 2014).

The bars show the percentage of the workforce employed in the agriculture and related sectors, the manufacturing and related sectors, and the service and related sectors from 1820 to 2010, as well as a projection for 2020. The service and related sector contains a wide range of service-providing activities such as retail, health-care, hospitality, education, and professional services. Growing efficiency in agricultural production led to employment in the agriculture sector falling from 83 percent of the labor force in 1820 to 1.6 percent in 2010. Employment in the manufacturing and related sector grew until the early 1960s as the Industrial

Revolution continued to cascade down through the years. However, by 2010 manufacturing and related areas only accounted for about 12 percent of employment, which is about a third of the percentage in 1960.

In the period from the 1870s to 1900, about one-third of people in the U.S. workforce were self-employed, largely as farmers, as shown by the line in the figure. However, by 1970 only about 9 percent of people in the U.S. workforce were self-employed, with a reduction of the number of people self-employed in farming contributing to this drop. There appears to have been a slight increase since then, with self-employment accounting for about 11 percent of the U.S. workforce in 2010, though some of the variations in self-employment since the 1960s are artifacts of the survey process used to gather the information and how people in incorporated entities were included. Interestingly, the United States had the second lowest self-employment rate of twenty-one developed countries in 2007, and a proportionately low participation in small business activity. The authors of one study, John Schmitt and Nathan Lane, speculate that lack of access to universal health care in the United States (bedeviled by a high-cost, marginally effective, largely private approach, as pointed out by Deborah LeVein in *Business Behaving Well*) has been a significant deterrent to entrepreneurial activity. The Affordable Care Act of 2010 is an important first step in addressing this by providing ready access to healthcare insurance regardless of preexisting conditions (a basic right in other developed countries).

The rate of business creation, entrepreneurial activity, in the United States was relatively stable between 1996 and 2012, showing a slight increase in 2009 and 2010 before returning to pre-recession levels. However, one measure of entrepreneurial climate (based on access to funding, entrepreneurship culture, taxes and regulation, education and training, and coordinated support) in 2013, based on a combination of survey feedback from more than fifteen hundred entrepreneurs across nineteen countries and the European Union, and quantitative country data based on entrepreneurial conditions, shows the United States at the top on this index, which speaks to the opportunity for adopting a nontraditional career path. Another study shows that more than 43 percent of Americans believe there are good opportunities for entrepreneurship around them, and 56 percent believe that they have the capabilities to start a business.

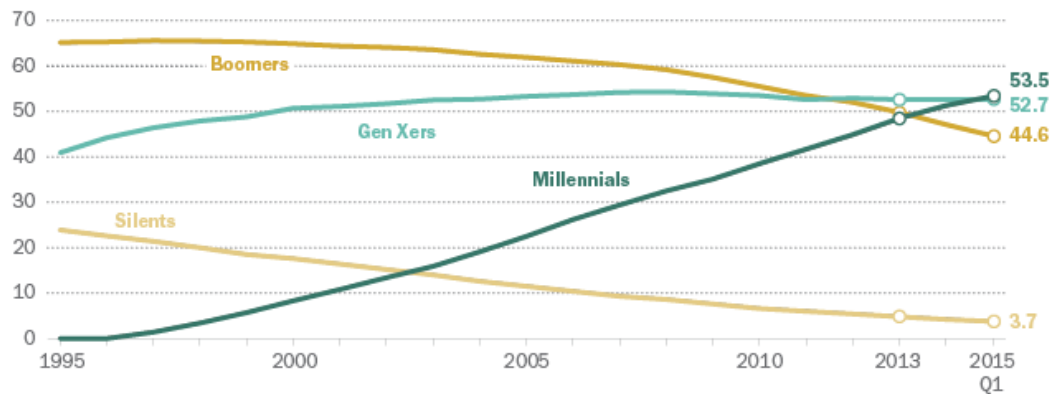
Momentous changes in the nature of work over the past two hundred years accompanied our economic evolution from an agriculturally based economy, through a manufacturing oriented economy, to today's information and service based economy. Our concept of work defined as being an employee in an organization is rooted in that manufacturing economy, which was dominated by large organizations with access to capital needed to operate and succeed. However, in today's economy, and that of the foreseeable future, information and services dominate. This changes the nature of work so that capital and scale are not the primary economic drivers, just as land ceased to be the primary economic factor after the transition from an agricultural economy. In an information- and service-based economy, human ingenuity and the capability to deliver effective services dominate. So it is not surprising that, after declining for more than seventy years, self-employment leveled off by the early 1970s, and it is poised to increase. By June 2013 there were almost fifteen million people identified as self-employed in the United States. Another study shows that in 2013, 40 percent of people in the U.S.

workforce aged twenty-one and older have worked in a nontraditional capacity (at least fifteen hours per week) at one time during their career. This is projected to increase to about 50 percent by 2020. Further measures show most job growth coming from self-employment between 2000 and 2011, a trend reinforced by continued growth in small business activity.

Significant generational shifts are occurring. Millennials have now surpassed Generation X, as the largest generational cohort in the U.S. workforce as shown in the following figure:

### U.S. Labor Force by Generation, 1995-2015

In millions



Note: Annual averages plotted 1995-2014. For 2015 the first quarter average of 2015 is shown. Due to data limitations, Silent generation is overestimated from 2008-2015.  
 Source: Pew Research Center tabulations of monthly 1995-2015 Current Population Surveys, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS)

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Source: Pew Research Center, Millennials surpass Gen Xers as the largest generation in the labor force, May 11, 2015

As this generational shift takes place, we have seen a continued decline in the unemployment rate, accompanied by an increase in the job openings rate, as shown in the following figures:

Chart 1. Unemployment rate, seasonally adjusted, June 2013 – June 2015

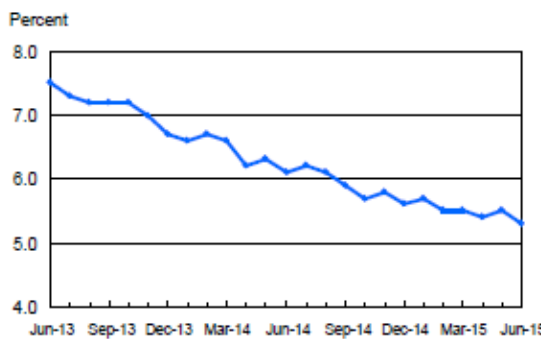
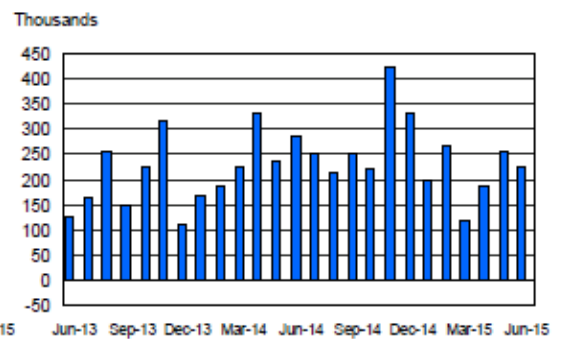


Chart 2. Nonfarm payroll employment over-the-month change, seasonally adjusted, June 2013 – June 2015



Source: BLS, News Release, The Employment Situation – June 2015

Chart 1. Job openings rate, seasonally adjusted, June 2012 - May 2015

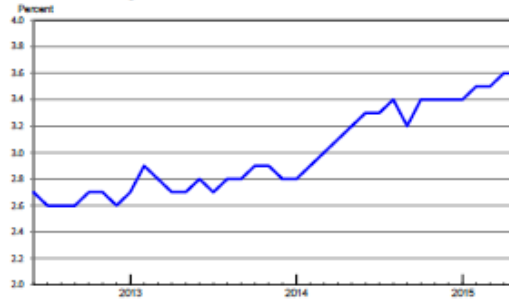
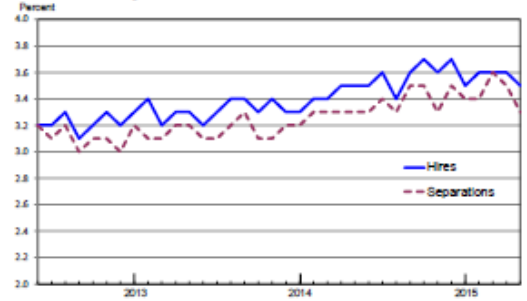
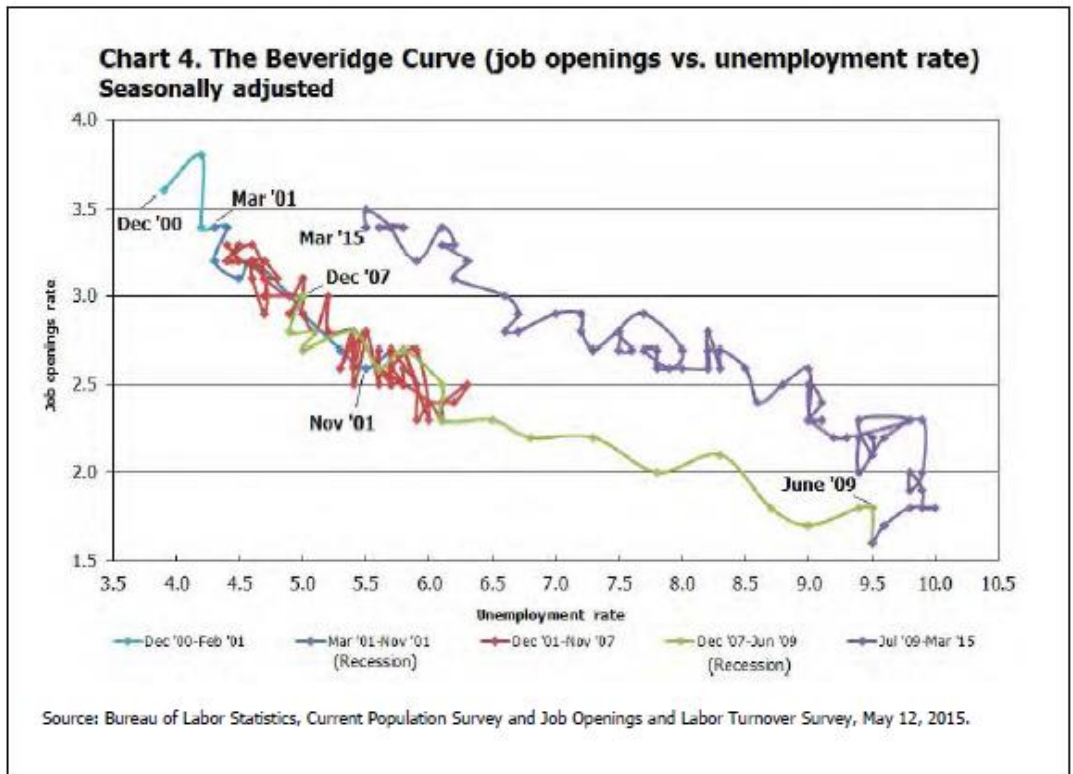


Chart 2. Hires and total separations rates, seasonally adjusted, June 2012 - May 2015



Source: BLS, News Release: Job Openings and Labor Turnover – May 2015

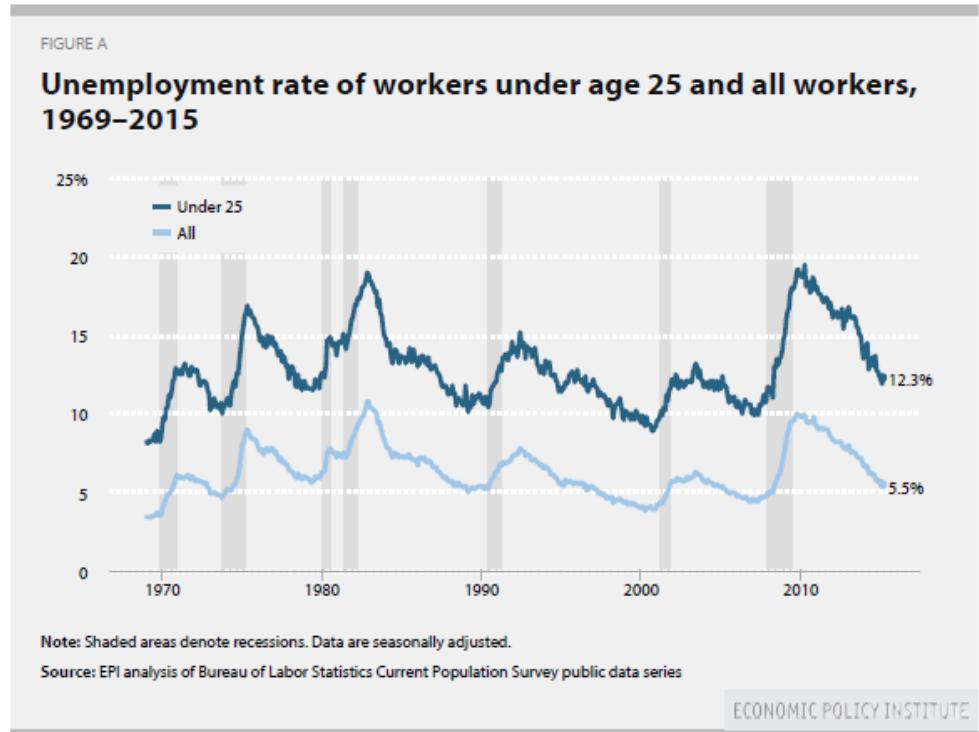
However, the Beveridge curve, which charts the relationship between job openings and unemployment, indicates the likelihood of a recent structural shift leading to disproportionately high unemployment rates. The unemployment rate corresponding to the March 2015 job openings rate would have been below 4.5% in the past rather than at an actual level of 5.5%, as shown in the following figure:



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey and Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey, May 12, 2015.

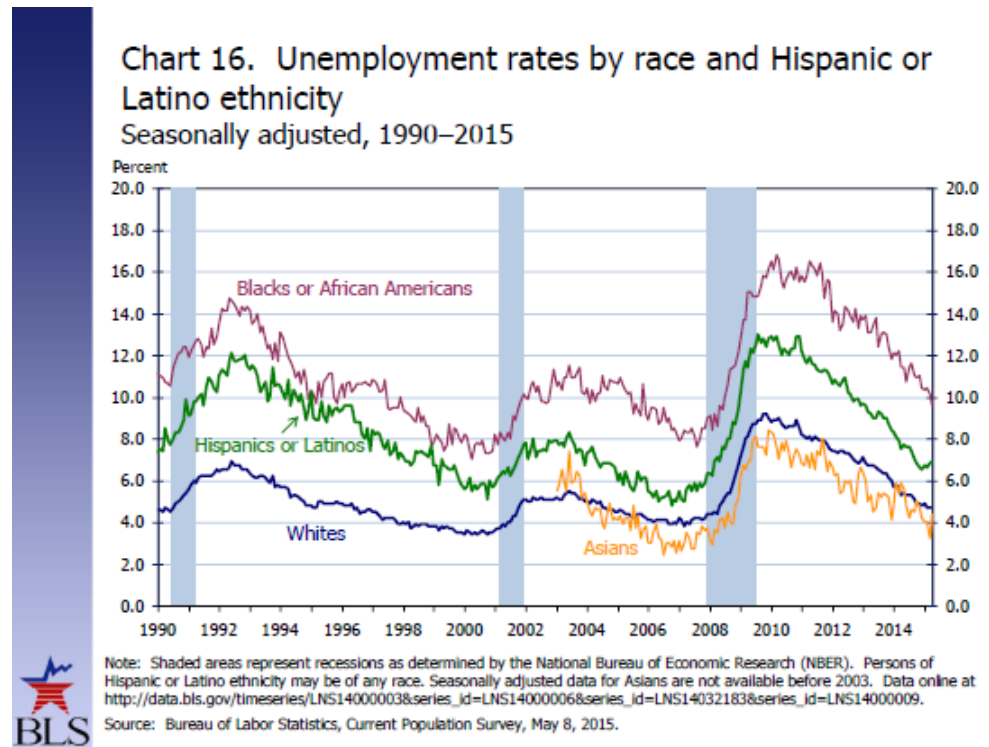
Source: BLS, Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey Highlights March 2015, May 12, 2015

Those under age 25 face a particularly high unemployment rate, as shown in the following figure:



Source: EPI, Briefing Paper, The Class of 2015, Despite an Improving Economy, Young Grads Still Face an Uphill Climb, May 27, 2015

As do African Americans and Latinos, as shown in the following figure:

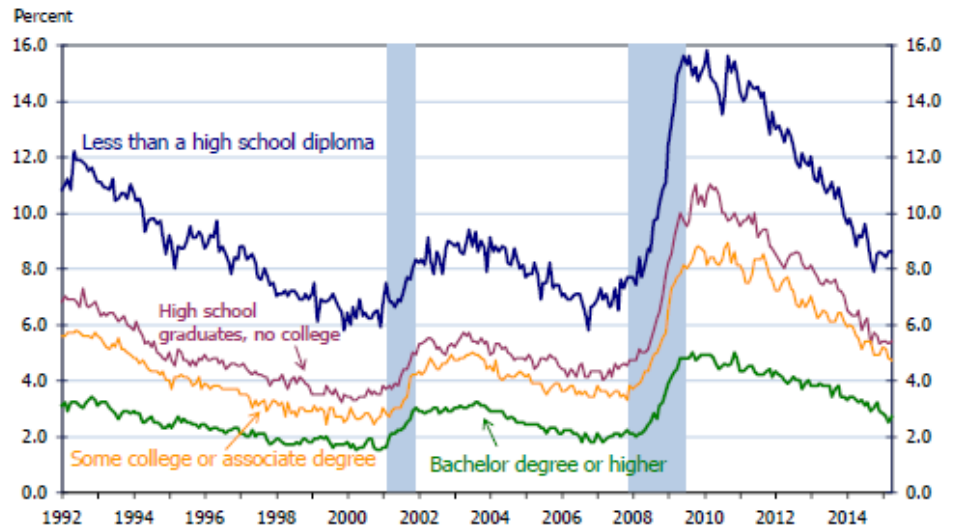


Source: BLS, Charting the Labor Market: Data from the Current Population Survey (CPS), May 8, 2015

And those with less than a high school diploma, as shown in the following figure:



Chart 17. Unemployment rates for persons 25 years and older by educational attainment  
Seasonally adjusted, 1992–2015



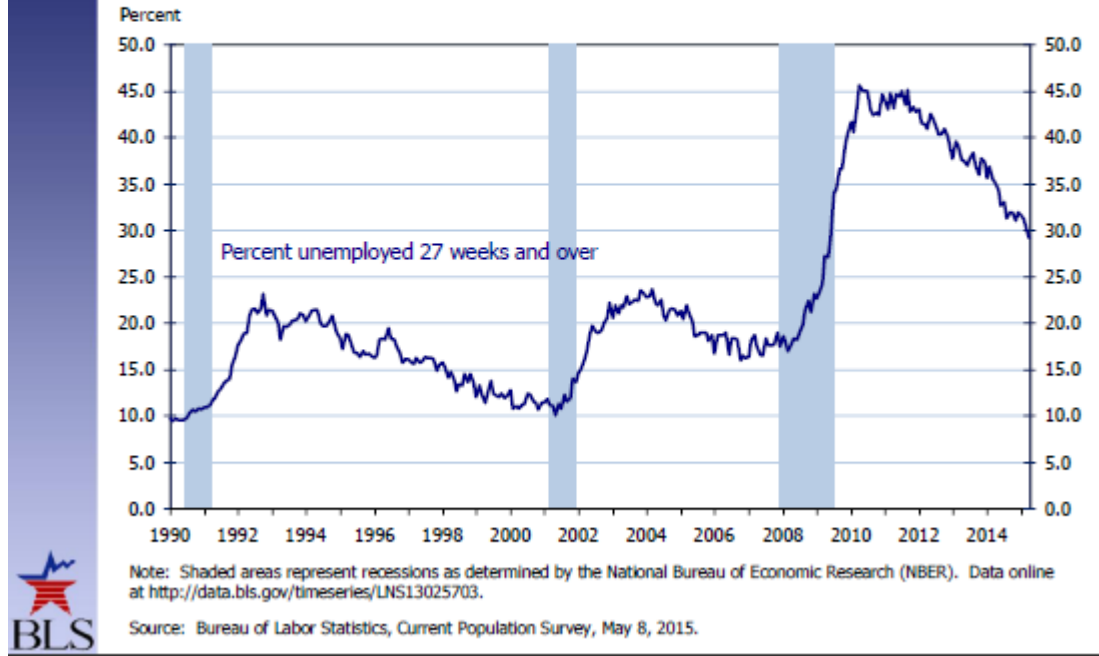
Note: Shaded areas represent recessions as determined by the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER). Data online at [http://data.bls.gov/timeseries/LNS14027659&series\\_id=LNS14027660&series\\_id=LNS14027689&series\\_id=LNS14027662](http://data.bls.gov/timeseries/LNS14027659&series_id=LNS14027660&series_id=LNS14027689&series_id=LNS14027662).

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey, May 8, 2015.

Source: BLS, Charting the Labor Market: Data from the Current Population Survey (CPS), May 8, 2015

Furthermore the percentage of those unemployed 27 weeks or more is still disproportionately high, as shown in the following figure:

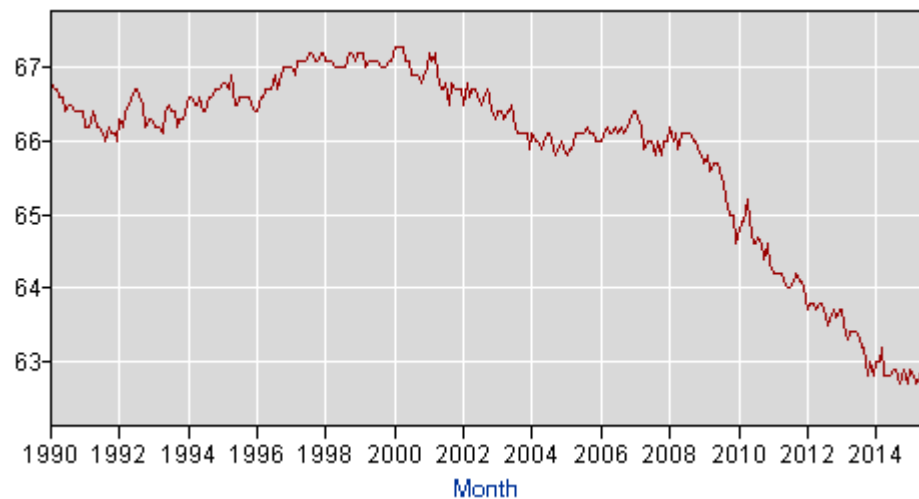
**Chart 12. Long-term unemployed as a percent of total unemployed**  
Seasonally adjusted, 1990–2015



Source: BLS, Charting the Labor Market: Data from the Current Population Survey (CPS), May 8, 2015

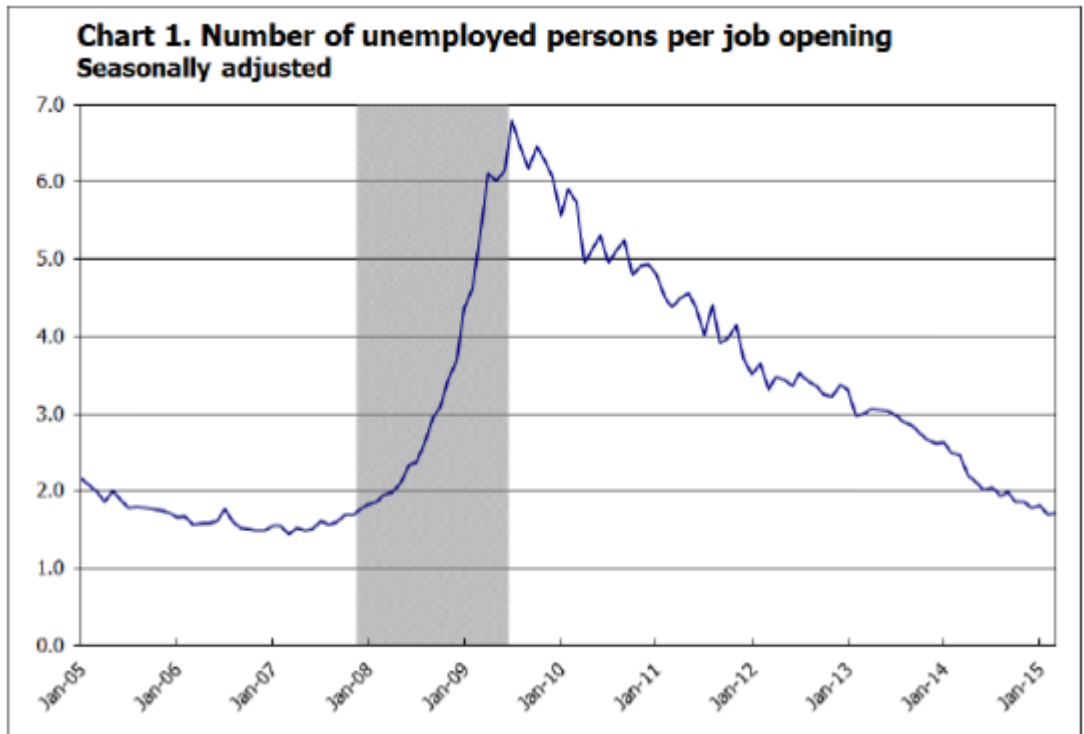
The labor force participation rate has dropped significantly, as shown in the following figure:

Civilian labor force participation rate (16 years and over), %, 1990 - June 2015, Seasonally Adjusted



Source: BLS, Current Population Survey, July 2, 2015

The number of those unemployed per job opening has now fallen to pre-recession levels, as shown in the following figure:

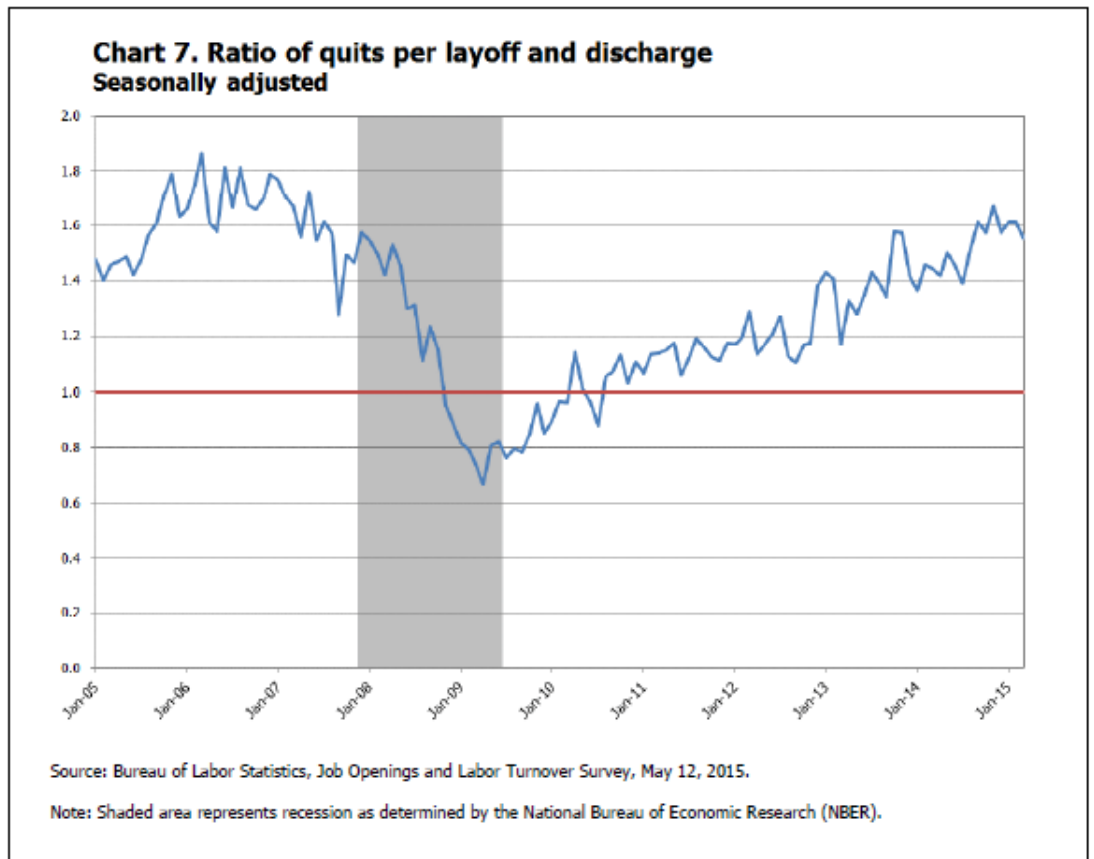


Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey and Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey, May 12, 2015.

Note: Shaded area represents recession as determined by the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER).

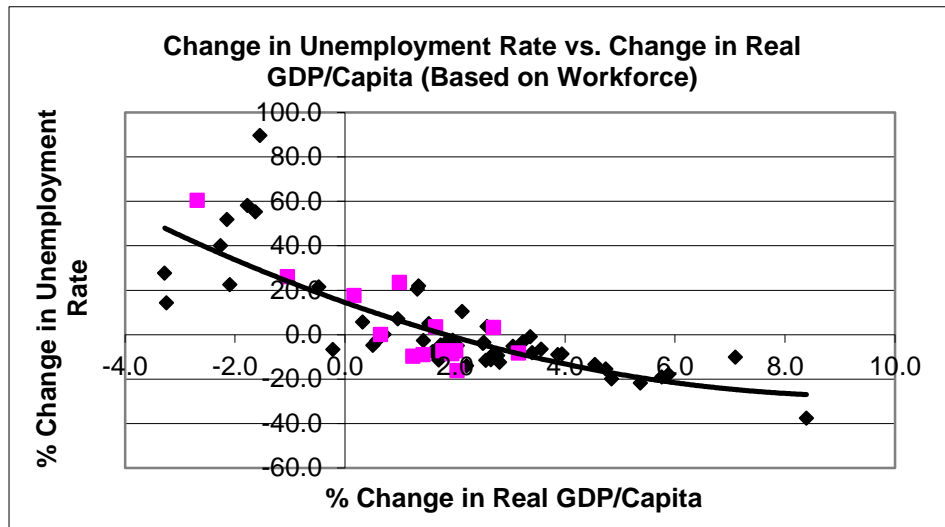
Source: BLS, Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey Highlights March 2015, May 12, 2015

Which is also reflected in quits significantly exceeding layoffs and discharges, as people gain confidence in their ability to secure new positions or pursue self-employment, as shown in the following figure:



Source: BLS, Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey Highlights March 2015, May 12, 2015

The relationship between changing unemployment rate and changes in GDP per capita, which we first observed in *Affiliation in the Workplace* for the period from 1947 to 2000 in the United States, has continued to hold. The following figure shows that more recent 2001 to 2014 data (the square, purple data points using real GDP expressed in 2009 dollars) follow the same trend as the original 1947 to 2000 data (the diamond, black data points with the associated trend line, also using real GDP expressed in 2009 dollars).



Source: Updated from *Affiliation in the Workplace: Value Creation in the New Organization*, Ron Elsdon (Praeger, 2003)

The figure shows that as GDP growth rate strengthens the change in unemployment rate shifts from an increase to a decrease. In 2015, GDP contracted in the first quarter. While GDP will likely grow over the full year, both the rate of GDP growth and the likelihood of continued strong job growth for the balance of the year and in the future, are uncertain. Such mixed signals, coupled with an awareness of the need and opportunity to take charge of our own destiny, speak to the growing appeal of nontraditional career paths.

Parts of this article are extracted from *How to Build a Nontraditional Career Path: Embracing Economic Disruption*, Ron Elsdon (Praeger, 2014), and from *Affiliation in the Workplace: Value Creation in the New Organization*, Ron Elsdon (Praeger, 2003).

## Quote

### ANYWAY

People are unreasonable, illogical, self-centered  
...love them anyway.

If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives  
...do good anyway.

If you are successful, you win false friends and true enemies  
...be successful anyway.

The good you do today may be forgotten tomorrow  
...do good anyway.

Honesty and frankness will make you vulnerable  
...be honest and frank anyway.

People love underdogs but follow only top dogs  
...follow some underdog anyway.

What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight  
...build anyway.

People really need help but may attack you if you try to help  
...help people anyway.

If you give the world the best you have, you may get kicked in the teeth  
...but give the world the best you have  
...anyway.

*A sign that Mother Teresa enlarged, framed and hung in the lobby of her orphanage in Calcutta, identified by Kent Keith as nine of his ten paradoxical commandments for student leaders published in 1968.*