

Q & A WITH BEVERLY RYLE

Finding work is difficult even in the best of times, but with gloomy economic news, layoffs, outsourcing, and general employment uncertainty, it feels even more daunting. In her new book, *Ground of Your Own Choosing: Winning Strategies for Finding & Creating Work*, Beverly Ryle teaches people to deal with the changing realities of the workplace in a way that offers them greater security and more satisfaction in the professional lives.

Ms. Ryle is the Director of the Center for Career and Business Development (www.SuccessOnYourOwnTerms.com) in Eastham, MA. She has been helping corporate professionals, business owners, and people-in-transition achieve their full potential through education and empowerment for over twenty years.

Here is our interview with the author.

1. What motivated you to write this book?

I got tired of watching people get shot down. When I started out as a career professional, there was such a thing as job security, and people stayed with the same company for years. Then came the layoffs in the nineties, and I worked as an outplacement consultant helping people who were being let go in droves. I was teaching them traditional job-search, all the things I now advocate against because, at the time, I didn't realize how dramatically the world of work had changed.

It took me a while to figure out that people looking for work using the traditional tactics were like doomed infantry soldiers charging across an open field without protection toward an entrenched force capable of cutting them down before they could get close enough to engage. It was clear to me that the only way they were ever going to have a chance of winning was to start out in a better position. I wrote the book to teach people how to conduct their work search from the high ground, the place on the battlefield where they have the advantage—the ground of their own choosing.

2. Who is the book for?

These ideas are valuable regardless of where you are in your professional life—just starting out, planning your retirement, or in transition somewhere in between. Still I recognize that not everyone is at a point where they are willing to take charge of their career. The book is for people who are ready to take ownership responsibility for their professional future, in the same way you would choose to become the owner of a business.

In other words, the book's usefulness depends more on someone's degree of openness than their age or where they are in their career. Frequently new graduates and people a few years out of college are more open to an entrepreneurial approach to work-search than mid-life executives with extensive business experience. I think this is because younger people are less invested in the old model. People who grew up with the passive methodology of a resume-driven job-search have to collect a lot of rejections before they are willing to try something different, which is unfortunate because by then they are already battle weary.

3. You write a lot about authenticity and the importance of aligning your unique talents and attributes to the work you do. Why?

Over the course of my professional lifetime, I've seen the idea of being fully satisfied with the work you do move from being a nice idea people talk about but never really expect to achieve, to a goal people actively seek.

A major impetus behind this comes from baby-boomers who are deciding, either because they have to for financial reasons, or because they want to as a personal choice, to continue working beyond retirement age. Rather than submit to the narrow choice between the status quo or retirement, they think, "If I'm going to keep working, I want to be doing something I like better, something that is more personally fulfilling, that makes a contribution."

4. Can people afford to think of what they want out of work in times like these when they're lucky to have a job at all?

Actually they can't afford not to. An employer, given the choice between several candidates, all of whom are equally qualified, will always choose the one he believes will do more than just get the work done. People who know inside themselves that a particular kind of work is the work they were put on earth to do, and who can articulate that conviction clearly, have a huge advantage over those who simply meet the requirements. One of best and most often overlooked ways to protect your professional security is to continually work a self-discovery process so that you can say with assurance, "I am the person to do this work."

5. What makes *Ground of Your Own Choosing* different than other career books?

If you go to the career section of a bookstore, you see mainly how-to manuals dealing with the mechanics of job search—resume preparation, networking, interview preparation. These books all suggest that if you get very good at these things the door to a golden future will magically open. The problem is that the long-term job security they are seeking is a thing of the past.

I wrote *Ground of Your Own Choosing* to bring work-search up to date. It explains how and why the world of work has changed and discusses the changes that need to take place in people's *thinking* before they can take the actions that will help them succeed on the new playing field. It speaks to those who feel insecure or frightened about finding work with understanding and compassion, and it leaves them with a sense of hope.

6. One of your chapters is entitled, "Throw Out Your Resume and Stop Networking." Isn't that a pretty radical idea?

The problem is not with the resume itself, but in how it's used. It's the exclusive reliance on one or two 8½" x11" sheets of paper to sell yourself that I take issue with. A business owner can't sit back and wait for customers to buy his product or use his service. He needs to figure out how to stimulate interest in what he has to offer, and he develops many tools for maintaining market visibility. Today's work-searcher needs to do the same. The resume protocol is administrative, rather than strategic, passive rather than proactive.

My quarrel with networking also has to do with how people go about it. It's always useful to make connections and expand your knowledge of the marketplace, which is what meeting new people is all about. Too often, however, networking has a self-serving agenda and short-term goals. What I suggest in the book is that people replace it, or at least supplement it, with what I call community-building, which has the long-term focus of creating mutually beneficial professional relationships that provide an infrastructure of support throughout your career.

7. What has this book got to say to people who want to change jobs, but hold on to what they've got because of the economy?

There is no security in any job, but there is a way to create a secure future—being on the lookout for work opportunities all the time, just as a business is always looking for customers. You don't do it just when you are miserable or after you've survived a round of layoffs. The first step is to stop trying to hold on to the security jobs can no longer provide. Then you need to find ways to get beyond whatever reservations you may have so that you can make work search comfortable enough to keep at it. Put simply, we stop doing what we don't like, and no work-search strategy is going to be successful unless it is pursued consistently. Other career books don't address this very real aspect of human nature. Having worked as a career counselor for many years, I know how people resist putting themselves out there, so I have focused on helping the reader overcome the self-defeat caused by inaction.

Change is difficult. It requires undergoing an often chaotic internal process of undefined length. In today's world, where graduation-to-retirement employment with the same company no longer exists, knowing how to remain in uncertainty long enough to recreate yourself is essential. The process of becoming is not easy, but it holds within it the key to a joyful and fulfilling work life.

8. Who has influenced you in shaping your approach to helping others find work?

I love the question about influences, because it's usually something asked of artists, and it reminds me that we can be creative in all kinds of ways. I have been fortunate to study with Richard Bolles, author of *What Color is Your Parachute?* and William Bridges, author of *Transition: Making Sense of Personal Change and You & Company*. They have been primary sources in shaping my thinking.

More recently, the study of effective leadership and the use of self has added a new dimension to my work. Much of what I teach is driven by my commitment to integrate both business and counseling disciplines.

9. What is your most important credential?

As I've been a career counselor with academic credentials in both counseling psychology and business for over twenty years and helped hundreds of clients make successful career transitions. But for me, I would say that, by far, the most important credential I have is that I live what I teach.

10. Is there something that someone might say to you after reading your book that would make all the effort to write it worthwhile?

One of my reviewers wrote that my book "reframes the task of finding work in a practical way that fits current times and helps the reader to be optimistic, proactive and even excited about it." There is nothing that would make me happier than to have this affirmed by people who use *Ground of your own Choosing* to find or create work.