

NO ONE IS UNEMPLOYABLE

by Elisabeth Sanders-Park

It's inevitable. Write a book entitled "No One Is Unemployable," and people feel compelled share with you their strong opinions about the idea. "You're so right!," I'm often told. "I once worked with a man who was... and today he's in job he loves and makes more than I do!" Other times, there is suspicion and pointed questions about where I work and with whom, how long I've been in the business and about my degrees and experience, generally accompanied by a raised eyebrow and the slight head-bobbing that belies their "yeah, but..." mindset.

So, what's your reaction to the idea that "no one is unemployable"? You may see yourself in one of the scenarios above. Most of us lean one way or the other, but I believe that we all harbor a bit from both sides. And, rightly so. We can all tell stories of candidates we secretly feared might never get a job offer. But, we did our job, and facilitated the process; they responded, and it worked! On these days, we know that if he can do it anyone can... no one is unemployable! But there are other days, with other candidates we thought would be great (or at least employed at some point), who we never saw get the job or succeed as we had wanted. And on these days, we are sure that some people are "unemployable."

The idea that "no one is unemployable" is not about describing the reality around you. It's about prescribing the spirit in which you work, cultivating a mindset that maximizes your creativity and willingness as you approach each candidate, each opportunity. We've all heard that envisioning our success, and writing down and speaking out our goals helps make them a reality. In the same way, embracing the idea that "no one is unemployable" is a step toward more success for you and the people you serve. Dare to tell a colleague that you believe "no one is unemployable" and two reasons why, then watch yourself prove it over and over. Write it down and post it in your work space, then see what it does for you and the people you serve!

When I began my work as a Career Developer, the unemployment rate for residents in my area fluctuated between 17% and 21%. If this weren't bad enough, my job was to help women on welfare (before any helpful legislation), with children, living in shelters who had myriad barriers from addiction to mental illness to criminal history, or all of the above. What was I to do? These women were going to have a hard time finding work in the best economy, and with this unemployment rate, forget it! So, what did I do? I stopped checking the unemployment rate. It didn't change the rate, but it did give me fighting chance to cultivate a more helpful mindset. I didn't need a thousand jobs today, just three opportunities for Sandra, three great ideas for Debra, three promising leads for Tina. It wasn't my job to monitor and bemoan the unemployment rate, but to help the women standing in front of me. So, I chose to believe that "no one is unemployable," despite their circumstance or the current economy.

It's been said that, "Those who believe it can't be done and those who believe it can, are both right." Our actions and results are based on our beliefs. If we believe it can be done, we're more likely to do it. If we believe that "no one is unemployable," our work is more likely to show it. Simple. In fact, I've been known to say, "Those who believe it can't be done, really need to get out of the way of those who are doing it." When a professional tells me they're working with someone who is unemployable, my first question is always whether the candidate has worked before. Strangely, in all but one case, the answer has been yes. I've actually had people try to convince me they're working with someone who is unemployable, and that person is currently employed! So it's not that they're unemployable, just that we are often at a loss to help them. I understand, and I suggest that we begin by cultivating a new mindset, fortified with hopeful, innovative and practical approaches to specific issues. I recommend my book, and this column, which will be a place you can come to for fresh ideas for serving tough candidates. In the

coming months, I'll be sharing lots of practical approaches for working with challenging candidates. I'd love to hear your questions and specific dilemmas.

Are you convinced, or at least willing to try for the next month to cultivate the mindset that "no one is unemployable"? Well, here's another reason to give it a go. Chances are, it's not your job to decide who is and is not employable. No one has asked you to make this determination. The employer decides, and the candidate's belief about their own employability plays a big role too. Those two perspectives are mightily important, but you're not on the list! Our positive belief in a candidate can do wonders, but our negative belief does nothing more than stunt our own creativity and willingness, and hinder our candidates' possibilities of success. Our mindset becomes their barrier. Ouch! And too often, we were wrong anyhow. The ones we thought would be great aren't, and the ones we thought would fail didn't. Perhaps, it's a good thing our job isn't to decide who is and is not employable! I know I'm not very good at it. However, many of us are very good at helping the people we serve to find and/or succeed in work that works for them, no matter where they come from... and that is our job.

So, have I ever met someone who is unemployable? No. People are created too uniquely and with too much natural talent to believe that, and the workforce requires all types of people. I have, however, worked with candidates so full of fear or so convinced of their own failure that they sabotaged a process which might otherwise work for them. I've worked with people whose lives were in such chaos at the time that they couldn't begin to focus, let alone succeed, on work. Some have since succeeded, others haven't... yet. I've worked with people who didn't succeed with me, but did with another Career Developer down the hall.

So, I believe "no one is unemployable," and I cultivate this mindset as a vital part of my qualification to do this work. It guides my learning, my growing and my every candidate interaction. It allows me to meet each new candidate with hope, innovation and practicality, and little by little it becomes not just my mindset, but the reality all around me. So, say it with me... "no one is unemployable."