

# Starting Over *Life After Downsizing*

by Deborah Wicks

After 25 years of doing the same job for the same telephone company, I am embarking on a new era of my life. About four years before I got laid off, my department downsized by 60 workers within a year. The work (and our workload) increased in most offices. The constant changes in management did not help the situation. We were always behind, not able to keep up. My last evaluation showed my productivity at 118% in efficiency, but I was only completing 58% of my assigned work. The long honeymoon ended in divorce.

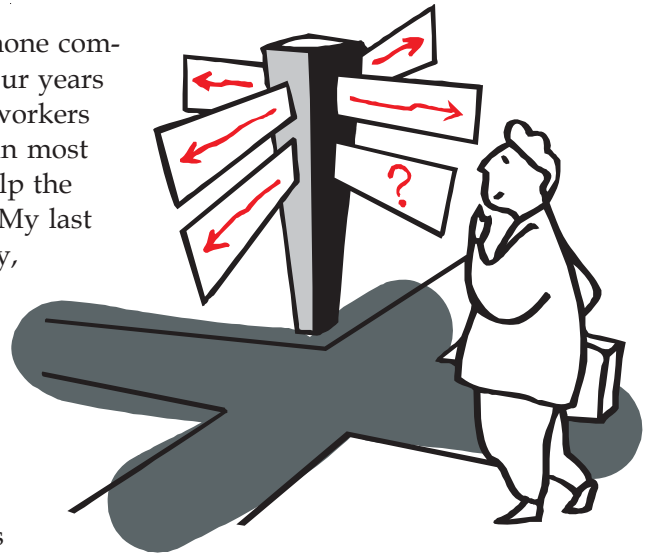
It took me weeks to realize I was free of the stress of my last two years. Downsizing in my department had given me the opportunity to leave with my benefits and my sanity. Now I could march to my own drum, but I needed to find a tune.

I had a lot of interests but no idea how to start this new era in my life. I was overwhelmed with feelings of not fitting into the computer age. While I was a technician for the phone company, my computer use had been limited to getting my work assignments. A friend on my block told me of a free computer training program that was being offered. I shared this information with another friend, and we both entered the program.

The first day of classes I felt like a fish out of water. It had been over 30 years since I sat in a classroom. In my work I never sat at a desk for any length of time, so that alone took some getting use to. We took math, business English and three classes to prepare us to enter or reenter the workforce. I rediscovered skills that I'd filed away three decades ago and now needed. The students in the program were a cross section of society, all there for different reasons, but one goal: to improve our lives. That goal bridged our differences making us one in moving forward as a group and individually.

At first I did not know if I had made the right choice. Was I cut out for this? Joyce, the friend who started with me, kept reminding me why we were there: learning new computer skills was the only way someone of my age could compete in today's job market. Joyce's reminder kept me coming day after day.

As time went on I began to feel more comfortable in my new skin, the one I chose for myself. I had wanted to change careers earlier but always had to consider my family's needs first. Finally I was able to put myself first. I've done all the physical work I ever wanted to do in my first career. Now, I want a position that will challenge my mind and give me a sense of accomplishment. I may not set the world on fire, but I now have more matches.



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*Deborah Wicks lives in Washington D.C. with her husband. She has a son, a daughter, and two granddaughters. In December of 2004, she received The Gateway Certificate, awarded to those who meet or exceed attendance and grade requirements, from the Community Preservation Development Corporation.*

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