

## GRIMLY FRUSTRATED LONG-TERM JOBLESS DESPERATELY SEEKING A WAY OUT



The long-term jobless are a frustrated lot. To them the numbers that analysts give suggesting that economic resurgence is round the corner or President Obama and Mitt Romney, pointing fingers at each other, accusing each other for the sluggish economy mean nothing – the repercussions of their long-term employment have been so dire, so severe that they are desperately seeking a way out. Byron Reeves sent out almost 1,600 resumes, with a prayer and hope, but leave alone landing a job, he could manage a trifling 10 or thereabouts, interviews. Yundra Thomas was shattered that he did not have \$300 to spare, so that his daughter could attend a band camp. Every week Mr. Reeves and Mr. Thomas and around 40 others, who have been unemployed for months or even years, gather in small furniture-less room, to find solutions amongst themselves, in a self-help program that is part of California's official effort to help residents find jobs. What makes their desperation even more hard to bear is that they were once advertising executives, engineers, social workers, teachers and purchasing managers, men and women, in their 40s and 50s, with their best years behind them, who once earned salaries that were enough for them to enjoy life's luxuries, buy homes and take vacations. Unfortunately, they are now reduced to attending meetings that don't yield results and at the end of which their conference-end 'banquet' consists of day old bread donated by a supermarket. The group call themselves, very aptly, may one add, 'Experience Unlimited.' It functions as a support group and a training ground, offering each other solace and hope and exchange experiences and tips on networking and resume writing. Around half of the group receives unemployment checks but many were ticked off the unemployment rolls this spring, when California failed to meet the requirements for extended benefits. It is feared that over the next few months, more, if not all will lose their benefits. Trish Polson, the director of Experience Unlimited in Corona, guesses that that a third of them would "take anything they could." Others have stopped expecting the "perfect job," but are still averse to accepting a job that pays a fraction of what they were earning earlier or something that is way below what they are qualified for. "Your whole life your job defines who you are," said Mr. Thomas, 48, who was laid off from his position as an advertising manager in February. "All of the sudden that's gone, and you don't know what to take pride in anymore." Mr. Thomas is one of the most active and outgoing participants in the group, frequently leading workshops on interviews and interpersonal skills. In the months that he has lost his jobs, he still dresses like he is going for work, so that his 11-year daughter does not feel, something is amiss in daddy's life. He keeps buying her treats like ice-cream cones, so she continues to believe that everything is hunky dory. He says that people are reluctant to join the group as it is, in a way, lowering their dignity. "A lot of people don't come here until they've spent some time at home licking their wounds," Ms. Polson said. "By the time they get here, the hardest thing is for them to check their ego at the door. They think they can do it alone. Their pride hasn't been hurt enough yet." But with a state unemployment rate at 10.7 percent, California lawmakers are at a loss how to get them back to work and the meetings, yield little, apart from helping keep their chins up.