

# Lee Quarnstrom

## On The Dole

**E**VERY DAY the newspapers carry the dreadful news: more and more people are being forced out of jobs as factories close, as plants cut back personnel, as\* businesses go belly up. Since I've had some experience at being unemployed—and specifically, at collecting unemployment benefits—I thought I'd pass along some tips to the businessman who suddenly finds himself out of work. (Yes, I realize I should also say businesswoman, but it would just take too much time and space throughout the rest of this column.)

The first thing to do is to find out where the unemployment office is located. This isn't easy, because the place isn't called the unemployment office. It's called the *employment* office, or the Employment Development Department (or EDD) to be more specific. In Santa Cruz, the EDD office is at 2200 Soquel Ave., across the road from Harbor High School.

The next chore is to find a parking place at the EDD office. The parking lot is designed to hold only half the number of vehicles needed by those inside filing claims, collecting benefits, etc. It's quicker to park illegally in the bus stop in front of the joint.

By the way, be sure you get yourself down to the EDD office as soon as you can after you've been fired or laid off. The state regulations about qualifying for unemployment benefits are bizarre...if you dilly-dally around for a day or two you might miss collecting benefits for an extra

Now, when you get inside the office, get in the information line. Or, if they have forms out on the counter ready to be filled out, fill them out, then get in the information line. Better yet, fill them out while you're waiting in line.

Waiting in line is something you'll have to get used to.

When you enter the office you'll notice a bunch of people sitting on cheap plastic chairs in the lobby. You'll think they're just sitting there waiting for their numbers to be called. They're not. They are in line—usually for Window P. I asked once why the longest lines—the ones where you have to move from chair to chair as you get closer to the front of the line—are at Window P. No one knew. I decided that Window P stood for Punishment.

When you finally get to the head of the line, don't be worried about the fact that you may appear different than some of your peers in the line. The days are long gone when the clerks would hassle you over your appearance. So just stand there confident that no one is going to tell you you're going to have to get rid of that blow-dry styled look if you want to find work.

Remember, the clerks are only there because you're there. If everyone had a job, the unemployment clerks wouldn't. So they are dependent on you and all the other unemployed bums for their jobs. Consequently, they are generally quite polite, pleasant and even helpful. In fact, most are downright nice people anyway.

One thing you'll discover when you get to the window is that your situation is unique. No matter that several thousand unemployed men and women come through the office each week. You are a special problem. You'll discover that for one



Pat Binford, one of the friendly clerks at EDD

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reason or another they can't figure out your case. So you'll get shunted to one side while a conference of EDD heavies is held somewhere back in the bowels of the building. Eventually, they'll come back and tell you everything is all right.

Now, you have to register and promise to seek employment. They assume that you don't want to be unemployed, that you do want to find work.

If you are beginning to collect your 26-week benefit, you can look for work in your own field. If you are on the 13-week extension after your original 26 weeks have run out, you are expected to look for any kind of work.

For the first 26 weeks, it helps to have been laid off from a job that is impossible to find—so you can collect your bi-weekly checks (they mail them to you most of the time) and look for work at a leisurely pace. For instance, in Santa Cruz you can expect to have trouble finding employment as a gaucho or an olive oil presser or a movie director. Consequently, EDD won't come up with a list of places where you can find work in the area. This means you can collect your checks and look for work in some other field at your own

pace. But you have to let EDD know that you have, in fact, sought work.

If you were laid off from a position as an accountant, you must go around to places which hire accountants and apply for jobs. Then you list these places on the back of a white form EDD sends you with your check. Be sure you fill out all the spaces; nothing bugs an EDD clerk more than discovering that you didn't look for work every day, as evidenced by empty spaces on the back of the white form.

When you do find work, if you're lucky enough to do so, let EDD know about it right away. It is a crime, I believe, to continue collecting unemployment benefits once you've gone back to work.

One other tip: When you're in the unemployment office, don't make it look like you're too anxious to get out of there and hit the beach. The EDD personnel look askance at the unemployed worker who has a surfboard under his arm or a bag of golf clubs over his shoulder.

Use common sense. They are there to help you. They want to be friendly and cooperative. But you've got to understand your role. You are, after all, going on the dole. •