

NEW CAREERS & LEARNING

Get back to the future

With the spectre of redundancy at large in the UK, **Kate Hilpern** explores the options for making a fresh start

Wendy Clarkson isn't worried about the recession. Less than six months ago, she was made redundant from a sector where there are now far more candidates than available jobs, and yet she has no fears. "The redundancy was a shock to start with. I'd been working in marketing for Sony for nearly six years. But I've since started up my own business in something completely different - complementary therapies - and not only do I love my job more than ever, but I'm on target to earn as much, possibly more, than I was," she says.

The spectre of redundancy is back with a vengeance, but growing numbers of people are choosing to turn it into an opportunity. They're getting what they can out of their soon-to-be ex-employer, both financially and practically, and then retraining. "I had a good pay off

'We often hear people talk about redundancy as the push they needed to get out of their career rut'

and the outplacement on offer was useful too. I had my own ideas about my new career, but they still helped me with some of the detail," says Clarkson.

While not everyone gets such a generous package offered on a plate, the right questions can ensure your employer helps you on your way, insists Damon Newman, director of the Mangrove, which provides redundancy workshops. You might feel too angry or depressed to start asking questions, he admits, but ask them you must. "After all, statutory redundancy payments are low - a 60-year-old with 20 years' service would get a maximum of £10,500. A 30-year-old with three years' service would get a maximum of £1,050."

If you are only offered statutory redundancy, he advises asking whether a statutory package is being offered to all those selected. You should also think carefully about any unresolved issues.

"If you have a genuine concern, now is the time to raise it since this can lead to a compromise agreement with additional compensation." He adds: "You should consider the terms of your contract too - and ensure that notice and other payments are correctly calculated."

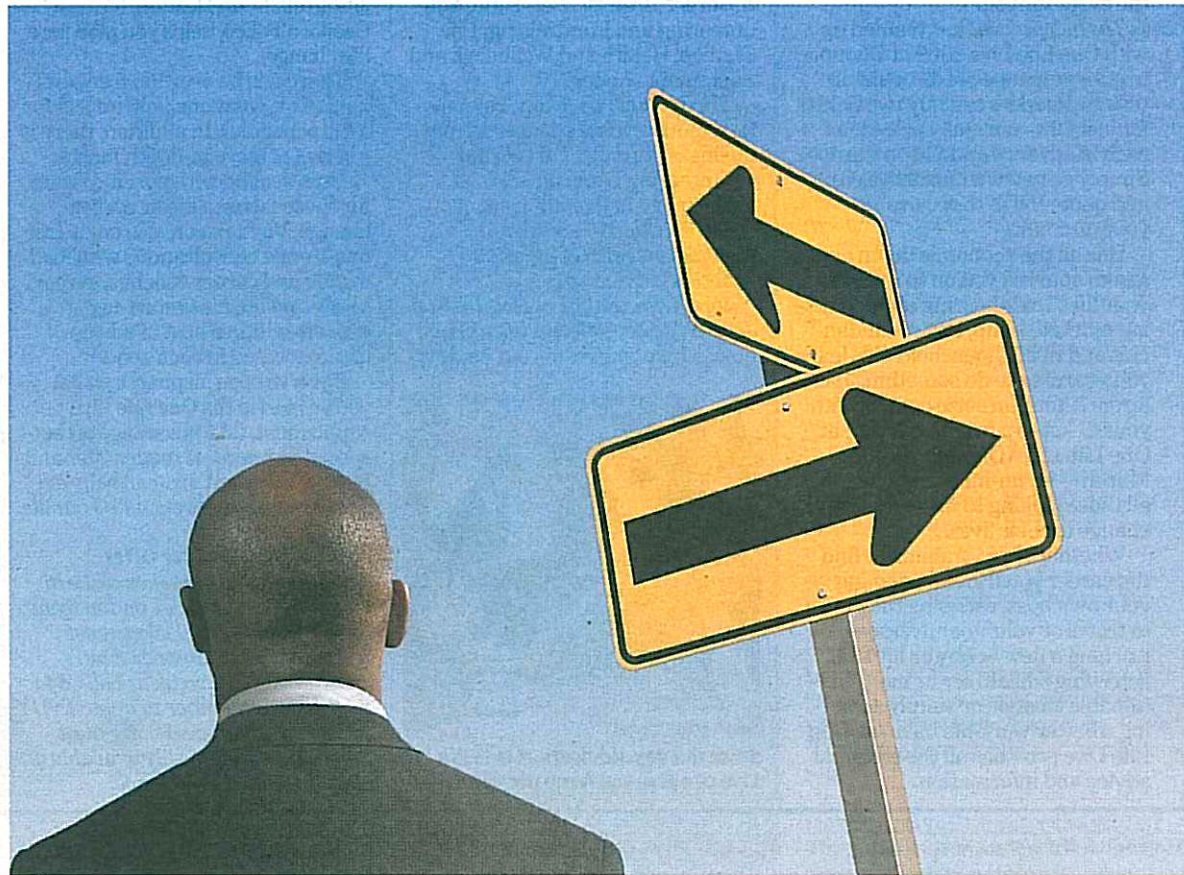
If 20 or more employees are being made redundant, remember that employers have to consult with trade union representatives or employee representatives - including consultation on ways of mitigating the consequences of redundancy. And take note that all employees who are being made redundant have a right to reasonable time off work during working hours to look for jobs or to make arrangements for training for future employment.

Emilie Cole, solicitor at Bindmans LLP, agrees that those facing redundancy need to know how to spot an unfair deal. "I'm seeing a lot of companies offering those they're making redundant very short periods of consultation or even being dismissed on the spot, even though they are normally entitled to a consultation period of at least 30 days. This gives employees very little time to work out they're being given an unfair deal."

Not all employers are out to stitch you up, however, as Clarkson's case shows. Noele McClelland, partner at Thorntons Law employment law team, points out that even if there aren't policies in place, employers may be willing to offer outplacement advice from people who can help with career planning, CV writing and interview techniques. "Some employers may even have their own retraining budget to assist employees."

It goes without saying that redundancy can come as a massive blow, says Owen Morgan, head of commercial operations at Penna Career Transition. "But, after the initial shock, many people find the experience a cathartic process. As careers advisors, we often hear people talk about redundancy as the push they required to get out of the rut that their career had fallen into."

Most people, he explains, are often swept along on a career path they may have fallen into, which may take them further and further away from their interests, skills and values. "Just because you've been an IT manager, it doesn't



Sign of the times: knowing which career path to take next depends on a proper assessment of your skills GETTY IMAGES

mean that's all that's available to you in the future. Assess your skills fully and you'll be surprised at the opportunities."

Peter Chavasse found that the skills he built up as a market analyst in the pharmaceutical industry have been useful in his new career in plumbing, tiling, bricklaying and carpentry. "Both involve a lot of analysis and piecing together data and facts. Both are also quite mathematical," he explains.

Andrew Woods discovered that his management experience in financial director role is transferable to his dream job in conservation. "The chief executive of a wildlife charity explained that running a charity isn't so different from running a small business," he says.

Cath Roan, managing director of Careershifters.org, who is also offering

free one-to-one coaching sessions at One Life Live at Olympia, 13-15 March (www.onelifelive.co.uk), says that besides a skills assessment, you should think about which parts of your job you've loved and loathed. That should help you draw up a dream job shortlist. "Next, think about how you would spend your days and how much training you'd need. The key is to do this in stages. If you look at it as one big job, it can feel too big."

Don't be put off by re-training - research from the Chartered Management Institute recently found that 64 per cent of employers think qualifications are becoming increasingly important and there is plenty of funding available for courses. Even moving into professions such as law doesn't have to take all the time in the world. ILEX (Institute of Legal Executives) offers the chance to become a lawyer without going to university or stopping working for a relatively low fee, for example.

Caroline Heasley, who worked as a conveyancer until she was made redundant last month, hopes to finish her ILEX training in June. "I'm building on existing skills - retraining in a new area of law, with the aim of applying to work in local government," she says.

Are the careers you're considering recession-proof? asks Roan. "Contrary to popular opinion, it's not all doom and gloom. I'm seeing plenty of people who are getting jobs and starting successful businesses. But you must do your homework about sectors and jobs."

Global search firm CTPartners point to a number of recruitment bright spots - including the financial services industry, albeit transformation roles. It adds that the insurance market is currently resilient, and that energy continues to

demand new staff. Then there's the healthcare industry, which continues to boast high demand for qualified workers. There's also the public sector.

Don't worry if your dream job sounds dull to others, says Claire Pedrick, director of 3D Coaching. "I worked with someone last week who discovered the ideal job for him doesn't sound at all impressive. Everyone thinks he should go for some great leadership role, but often people work further and further up the tree of management and when they stop to think about what they really want, it's something far less high-flying."

John Lees, author of *How To Get A Job You'll Love*, adds, "You don't need a perfect job, just one you enjoy three-and-a-half days out of five. A 70 per cent overlap between your wish list and the true needs of an organisation will do the trick." He adds that people shouldn't refresh their CV, but rethink it. "Put your story into simple terms - who are you, what do you have to offer, what are you looking for? Then look again at the first 20 words of your CV - is this the same message? If you want to change career path, your CV needs to be very clear about why you want a change of direction."

For Steve Miller, author of *Get Off Your Arse and Grab that New Job*, confidence is key. "With many people I see, there's no shortage of skills and experience, but a massive lack of confidence, often brought on by the redundancy. It can be worth spending out some money developing your confidence through a coach."

So often, says Janet Davies, editor of *New Life Network*, the people who are the most devastated when they're made redundant are the same people who very quickly realise they really hated their old job. "They get this new lease of life."

'Do something you enjoy and you won't feel like you're at work'

Mark Green, 44, was recently made redundant from his job as a licensed conveyancer in the housing market. He has re-trained as a personal trainer in Bristol, where he lives on his own.



August last year, a colleague who had been to a personal trainer after a GP referral said, "You know, you'd

be great at that.' At first I thought it was a silly idea, but actually 'running' was one of the things listed on my CV as 'interests'. I Googled 'personal trainer' and saw the Lifetimehf.co.uk website.

I gave them a ring and they said part of the training was government-funded. I enrolled and did part of it as distance learning and part of it in the classroom. It was intense - I did it in less than two months - but I love learning, so it wasn't a chore.

It has been ridiculously easy to get work. There's a Fitness First gym where I live

and although its personal trainers are essentially self-employed, you get your clients through them.

It's the best job in the world. My only concern at the moment is generating enough clients, but it seems to be going well. In some ways, it's not that different to what I was doing - in that you're advising people based on your knowledge base.

In one book I read on how to get a job, it said if you do something you enjoy, you never really feel you're at work - and that certainly resonates with me."