

The better

The recession is hitting everyone hard. Now nearly 250,000 people were unemployed in the first quarter of this year. Women tell how they turned terrible situations into great opportunities. **By Claire O'Boyle**



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It's scary but can be fantastic

Mum-of-one Eileen Taylor had been an admin worker in the same company for 23 years when she found out her job had been axed. "I joined the firm as a junior clerical worker at 16," says Eileen, from Hartlepool. "I worked my way up and ended up very settled and on a pretty good wage."

Eileen, 39, was one of nine staff made redundant from the building supplies company in January. "I don't think I had time to feel upset. I was told I'd have time to clear my desk and say goodbye to my colleagues, then I was out."

"Almost straight away I decided to take it as a chance to do something positive. "I'd been thinking about becoming a teaching assistant for about five years and this was my chance to go for it."

An adviser from Jobcentre Plus told her to contact her local school to volunteer to help out. "I got in touch with my son's old primary school and I was soon doing a couple of afternoons a week," says Eileen, who has now applied for a year-long college course to train as a teaching assistant.

"I hope I get a place but either way I'm glad I've made the leap to something I'm passionate about. It can be scary to change suddenly but it's also exciting - just be focused and figure out what steps you need to take."

"It won't happen overnight but it's definitely worth a go."



I'm actually glad that I lost my job

Liz Penman's world collapsed the day she and thousands of Woolworths colleagues heard the store had buckled in the credit crunch.

The mum-of-two, 43, had worked in Woolies for 27 years - she joined the ranks at 16 with no qualifications. "I'd dedicated my adult life to the store and I was terrified to go out into the world unable to do anything else. When I heard we were all losing our jobs, I cried my heart out. We were all close friends."

After almost 30 years with the company Liz received a final redundancy package of £3,600. "I was angry and upset about the payout," says Liz, from Wishaw, Lanarkshire. "I was so down I didn't know if I'd ever work again."

But within weeks Liz picked herself up and resolved to turn it into an opportunity. "I went to the Jobcentre and spoke to an adviser there who said I could retrain. My husband Jim is a clinical support worker and I'd always been interested in his work."

"A few times over the years I thought I'd love to take the leap and try to train to do the same sort of work but I never had the nerve. Finding myself out of work meant all those reasons I decided not to do it were gone."

Liz was soon accepted on a Clinical Support Workers course in Cumbernauld College, Glasgow. "I was so excited. It was full-time for five weeks, a mix of class work and placements at different hospitals."

"I loved it and passed the course with no problem. I'm now bank nursing, which means I'm basically a freelance support worker. "Sometimes, I do a full week and other times I just do one or two days. It works brilliantly for me - I'm doing a job I enjoy and it challenges me."

"I never would have gone for it if Woolies had stayed around. To make that jump when things are comfortable is difficult. I'm surprised at myself saying this after how awful I felt at the time but being made redundant really did open a lot of doors for me and I'm glad it happened."

Getting back to work

Career expert Steve Miller says... Losing your job doesn't have to be all doom and gloom - remember, it is the job that is redundant, not you!

Make a budget planner and inform the bank what has happened. It's important to keep them sweet.

Next, list all the skills you have that you can transfer to a new employer. In addition to this, consider retraining for your dream job. Take out a career development loan to help fund study

towards specialist qualifications. For many people, redundancy can also mean setting up a small business.

Steve's guide to a great CV

Your CV should be divided into these six key sections:

- Personal details;
- Personal profile, including career summary and objective;
- Outline your work experience, starting with the latest. Outline six key achievements from each job;

- List your qualifications;
- List achievements and interests;
- Provide details of references.

His top interview tips

- Rehearse answering questions you are likely to be asked at the interview.
- Research the company.
- Ensure your image is professional.
- Create good rapport.
- Always give examples to back up your answers.

STEVE MILLER IS THE AUTHOR OF CHANGE YOUR LIFE - GRAB THAT JOB (HEADLINE, £6.99) - OUT NOW.