

## Illinois Labor Market Review

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# Helping Job Seekers Overcome Barriers in their Job Hunt

**Job clubs, computer workshops and job training programs are some of the resources the state offers**

by Yolanda Y. Harris

John Taylor of the Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES) starts off his monthly employment workshops asking job seekers how they feel about sales people. The former salesman and state government deputy director says he gets answers like “pesky” and “persistent.” Then, he tells his audience to get their sales lines ready because a personal sales campaign, he said, is needed for an effective job search.

“A lot of people don’t want to be in sales and don’t like sales people,” Taylor said. “The good news is you only have to make one sale, and it’s done.”

Taylor, an IDES Program Representative, presents his monthly workshop, called “Marketing Your Skills: Selling Yourself in Today’s Job Market,” during a job club meeting held at the Illinois workNet Center, IDES’ Springfield office, located at 1300 S. Ninth St.

The job club, held every Friday, is among several strategies that workforce development agencies use across Illinois to help job seekers, some of whom state employees say have not searched for jobs in 20 years, find work. IDES offices host job fairs, offer basic computer classes, refer job seekers to job training programs and conduct mandatory



*John Taylor, IDES Program Representative, presents job hunting tips to job seekers.  
Photo by Shelia Cutright*

one- to two-hour re-employment workshops (offering job hunting tips and an overview of state employment and job training services) for job seekers who have filed claims for unemployment insurance benefits.

“I think they leave the workshops with a glimmer of hope,” said Rich Fox, an IDES employee who conducts re-employment workshops and helps job seekers develop resumes at the Workforce Network in Peoria.

In Springfield, Land of Lincoln Workforce Alliance and IDES have held the weekly job club meetings since the fall of 2009. Christine Schick, Workforce Advisor for Land of Lincoln Workforce Alliance, said the job clubs are “therapeutic” for job seekers because they bring people together with similar experiences.

“Some of the same people are coming back and looking forward to it,” Schick said. “It’s helping people to have that camaraderie and share ideas of job openings that would benefit other people.”

That’s exactly what a job club should do for job seekers, said Marilyn Moats Kennedy, a Wilmette, Ill.-based management consultant who has written books on career planning and workplace issues. “It’s all about helping them find solutions and self help.” Although job clubs bring job seekers together, Kennedy cautions that they not become a place where people talk gloomily about job prospects. “With every negative comment, give a positive response.”

## Ridding job seekers of negative feelings

Reframing negative job or job hunting experiences into positive ones is what Land of Lincoln Workforce Alliances and IDES tackle through an ongoing five-week job search learning series they have offered at the Illinois workNet Center since January of this year. The workshop features sessions on handling job loss grief, understanding computer basics, composing resumes and cover letters, completing online and paper job applications and interviewing.



*The Springfield team helping jobseekers improve their job search. From left to right are: Bryon Morlock, Veteran’s Employment Representative, IDES; John Taylor, Employment Security Program Representative, IDES; Valerie LeSeure, Workforce Advisor, Land of Lincoln Workforce Alliance; Christine Schick, Workforce Advisor, Land of Lincoln Workforce Alliance; Jay Schukai, Veteran’s Employment Representative, IDES; and Sheila Cutright, Employment Security Service Representative, IDES. Photo by Terry Andrick.*

The first workshop session in the series tackles the emotional barriers to a successful job search and is led by Valerie LeSeure, Workforce Advisor for Land of Lincoln Workforce Alliance. LeSeure helps job seekers rid themselves of negative attitudes that could manifest during job interviews.

“If you can let go of negative feelings associated with your job loss, and let your mind be quieted, you can process it easier,” LeSeure said. “And you can open yourself up to new opportunities.”

LeSeure said job seekers come into the Springfield office with a range of emotions, including anger, denial, fear and shock. “I spend a lot of time with people in my office with a lot of Kleenex.” She even brings a box of Kleenex with her to her workshops.

LeSeure helps job seekers cope with job loss by offering the following tips: accept that job loss is beyond one’s control, tap

into a greater spiritual power for strength, share one’s inner feelings with a confidant, make attitudinal changes, redefine what is meaningful or valuable and volunteer. “Doing something positive for someone else causes a brain reaction.” LeSeure said. “It can be a mood elevator.”

In addition to serving as a mood elevator, volunteering could lead to a new job, said Jerry Brumsfield, an Employment Service Representative who helps job seekers in the IDES Chicago office located at 8750 S. Stony Island. “If you can’t do a job and get paid for it, do volunteer work, and that will lead to a job.”

Kennedy suggests that job seekers make either temporary or volunteer work a part of their weekly routine. “Two days a week you should either be working a job or volunteering. Three days a week, you should be job hunting.” She explained that job hunting five days a week can cause

## Job Hunting Tips from a Salesman

John Taylor, experienced salesman and an Illinois Department of Employment Security presenter on job hunting, offers job seekers the following tips:

- **Understand your target market.**  
Determine what employers you will target, research them, and know what you can offer them.
- **Account for your time.**  
Track how you spend your time during the day so that you can avoid wasting time.
- **Do not just hunt for jobs online.**  
Make cold calls to employers.
- **Know your numbers.**  
Know how many people you have called each day and their responses.
- **Have good marketing materials.**  
A resume, a portfolio, if appropriate, and a professional image.
- **Change your attitude about rejection. Avoid negative thinking.**  
You aren't going to get to "yes" without a lot of "noes."



burnout. But temping a couple of days a week keeps job seekers active while providing income. Volunteering, as an alternative, leads to job contacts.

**Just like in sales, the more calls or direct contact that job seekers make with employers, said Taylor, the closer they come to finding a job.**

### Decreasing anxiety about computers

The Illinois workNet Center staff in Springfield observed that some of their job seekers who were not familiar with computers had increased anxiety about job hunting. So the second workshop in the center's five-week job hunting series offers job seekers basic training on computers and on using www.IllinoisSkillsMatch.com, IDES' online job matching system. "Once the fear factor is over and they gain confidence, that is half the battle," Schick said.

The third workshop in the center's job search series instructs job seekers on developing electronic resume and cover letters. In week four, job seekers get tips on how to complete online job applications. "One of the things people don't know is that they're being timed," said Schick. "If they take too much

time, they could become disqualified." Also realizing this dilemma, IDES' Rockford office teamed up with Entre' Computer Solutions, which held nine months of free on-site computer classes for job seekers.

### Helping job seekers sell themselves

Once job seekers overcome negative feelings about job hunting and become more at ease with using a computer and the Internet, they are ready to hear IDES' John Taylor's tips on making the sale.

Prior to joining IDES in 2009, Taylor enjoyed an 11-year career in sales, where he sold products ranging from industrial supplies and copiers to management consultant services. He advises job seekers to liken their job search to a sales job. And he tells them to not take rejection personally.

“You aren’t going to get to ‘yes’ without a lot of ‘noes.’ Look forward to them because you’re going to get closer to yes,” said Taylor, who also served as a Deputy Director for the Illinois Department of Commerce and Community Affairs in the early 1990s.

Taylor also advises job seekers to not limit their job search to the Internet. “You can’t just look at what’s on the Internet because thousands of people are looking at that.” Instead, Taylor said job seekers should know what companies they want to target, make cold calls to employers and keep a record of their phone calls.

Just like in sales, the more calls or direct contact that job seekers make with employers, said Taylor, the closer they come to finding a job. The general rule of thumb in sales, explained Taylor, is that it could take 100 phone calls to get 20 people to talk to you. Out of that 20, five people may invite you to share more about your product in person.

And of those five, one might buy. “You’ve gotta discipline yourself and make sure you’re doing what you’re supposed to do because if you don’t, it will show up in the numbers,” Taylor said.

When making contact with employers, job seekers should also get help from people within their network, said Kennedy. For those job seekers who did not go to college and therefore think they do not have a network, Kennedy said consider religious institutions and former high school classmates. “They all didn’t drop dead the day you graduated. So don’t tell me you don’t have a network.”

Taylor acknowledges that job hunting, like sales, can take job seekers for a ride on an emotional roller coaster. But for those with an aversion to sales, he said only one sale is needed in the job hunt. “You only gotta make one sale, and you’re out of the sales business.”

*Yolanda Y. Harris is Editor of the Illinois Labor Market Review*

## Job Help Around the State

by Yolanda Y. Harris

Here is a look at what some Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES) offices around the state are doing to help overcome barriers in their job hunt:

### Rockford

Tackling the education levels of its clients is a major challenge of IDES’ Rockford office, said Richard Hrynkow, IDES Field Office Supervisor of Employment Service Programs in Rockford. “We have less than the national average of high school graduates and college graduates,” Hrynkow said.

According to the U.S. Census, 78.4 percent of Rockford residents age 25 and older have high school degrees or higher, compared to 84.5 percent for the nation; and 18.8 percent of the Rockford population has at least a bachelor’s degree, compared to 27.4 percent for the nation.

To address this dilemma, the department’s Rockford office, called the Workforce Connection, has reserved a space in its lobby so that colleges and training organizations can regularly recruit job seekers for academic programs. Also, because many online job applications are timed, the Workforce Connection last fall partnered with Entre’ Computer Solutions to offer job seekers free basic computer training at the IDES Rockford office, located at 303 N. Main St. Entre’ originally agreed to offer the free four-hour computer class once a month for three months starting last October. But because the class had a waiting list, Entre’ extended the class twice for three months each time, with the last class ending on June 17.

### Chicago

A lot of job seekers who come to the Chicago Workforce Center at Pilsen, 1700 W. 18<sup>th</sup> St., had manufacturing jobs that were phased out, and they lack the necessary computer and math skills required for newer manufacturing jobs, said Maria Talis, Employment Service Supervisor.

## Maximize Online Job Hunting

**Jay Schukai, Veterans Employment Representative of 28 years in the Illinois Department of Employment Security Springfield office, offers these tips to help U.S. veterans and job seekers in general maximize their online job hunt:**

On [www.IllinoisSkillsMatch.com](http://www.IllinoisSkillsMatch.com), (IDES online job matching system):

1. Analyze your skills and enter all of them into [www.IllinoisSkillsMatch.com](http://www.IllinoisSkillsMatch.com).
2. Provide full job descriptions for all of your previous jobs and avoid uncommon acronyms.
3. Lower the minimum salary you would accept for a job.
4. Increase the maximum distance you would travel to work.
5. Check [www.IllinoisSkillsMatch.com](http://www.IllinoisSkillsMatch.com) regularly for job matches.

### Through online job applications:

1. Have a master application already prepared before completing an online application. “The longer the person takes to fill out an application, the less desirable they become,” Schukai said.
2. Follow-up with the employer a couple of days after completing your application.

So she encourages job seekers to improve their skills. “This is a perfect time to be in training,” Talis said. The Pilsen office has helped 50 job seekers access training that has prepared them to take apprenticeship tests and earn Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) certifications. In addition, the Pilsen office works with Teamsters’ Joint Council 25 and Joint Council 65 to recruit military veterans for “Helmet to Hardhats,” a national program that connects veterans to jobs training and to employment opportunities in such fields as construction, transportation and government. A new partnership is underway between the Pilsen office and Service Employees International Union for a similar initiative called “Helmets to Healthcare,” which will help veterans get training for civilian medical jobs.

### Harvey

IDES employee Gregory Shephard said that, in addition to skills shortages, a lack of transportation presents challenges for job seekers in Chicago’s south suburbs. “It seems to be an increasing resistance factor in terms of being able to accept employment because they figure ‘if I have to drive 45 miles to get a job, it’s going to cost me more in the long run

than if I had to drive 15 miles to work,’” said Shephard, an Employment Service Program Manager.

To help job seekers access employment opportunities, IDES’ Harvey office, 16845 S. Halsted, partnered with River Oaks Community Church, in South Holland, and hosted its annual spring job fair on April 22. Some 875 job seekers and 28 employers attended the job fair. Last year, 400 job seekers and 40 employers attended the job fair at the Markham Park District. The department’s Harvey office will partner with the River Oaks Community Church again in November for its annual veterans job fair.

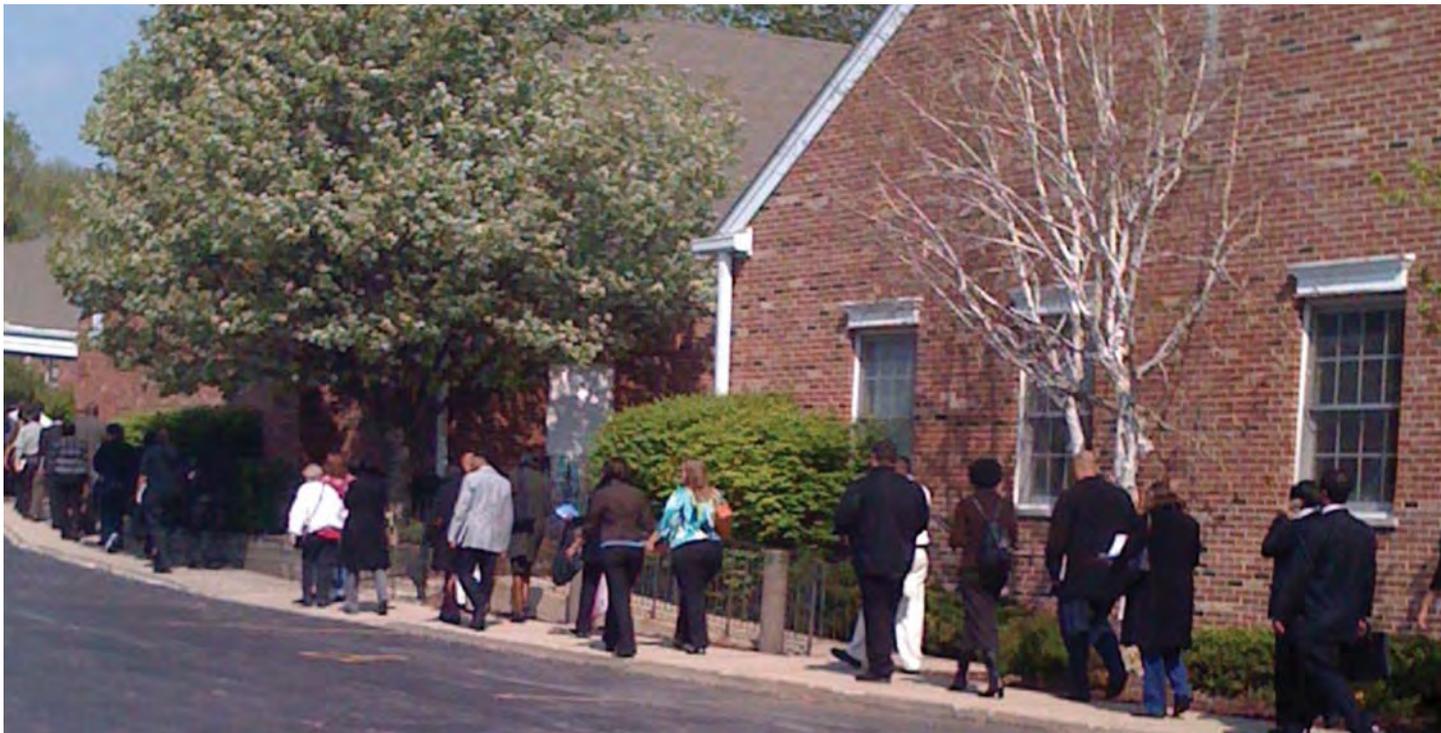
### Bloomington

A lack of awareness of available job hunting and community resources is the challenge that Mick Mills, a Local Veterans Employment Representative, has worked to help job seekers overcome. So two years ago, Mills launched a monthly two-hour seminar for veterans and their family members called Veterans Information Benefits and Employment Seminar or VIBES. The seminar, held at the Illinois workNet Center, 207 E. Hamilton Road, in

Bloomington, Ill., features panelists from state and county government and community organizations offering information about employment and entrepreneurial resources as well as unemployment, medical, disability and education benefits. Mills also talks about these resources as a guest every Friday on the Ron Ross radio talk show, WJBC (1230 AM), in Bloomington - Normal.

### Springfield

Some job seekers at IDES’ Springfield office, also known as the Illinois workNet Center, 1300 S. Ninth St., have not looked for work in 20 years, according to Christine Schick, Workforce Advisor for Land of Lincoln Workforce Alliance. Land of Lincoln Workforce Alliance and IDES host a free five-week workshop at the center for job seekers needing in-depth guidance on job hunting, interviewing, computer basics, completing online job applications and overcoming negative emotions. The center also hosts a weekly job club on Fridays. At the club meetings, job seekers share job leads and receive job hunting tips from human resource managers and workforce development professionals.



*Job seekers entering IDES Harvey office’s annual spring job fair, held at the River Oaks Community Church in South Holland, on April 22, 2010. Photo by Albert Sancho.*