

## Laid off and learning

**By Dave Hansen**

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People tell me not to worry. I'm unemployed, without permanent shelter, and my wife is pregnant with our third child. People say I will find work. "You're so talented," they say. "You have an MBA, and with all your technology experience, somebody will hire you."

MBA ... technology ... words that once held so much promise. Now I'm part of the vast sea of laid-off technology types in Seattle.

Of course I was stunned at first, thinking myself immune. But it's been a few months and the shock has settled into a gnawing, low-level anxiety.

Don't let anyone tell you otherwise: Unemployment feels like someone pushed you through a rip saw, right above the kneecaps.

At first I tried to fight back by getting a job immediately. I littered the place with résumés, called up everyone I knew. Nothing. So I took a vacation, my first two-week vacation in 10 years.

I piled the two boys and wife into the minivan and went tent camping. Too much gear, too much activity, but after the first week or so, the pace slackened. I started noticing the stars. With each crackle of the campfire, the hole in my heart started searing shut.

I actually heard my boys talking to me. I lingered fondly over my wife. I heard, again, that little voice deep inside that I had kept quiet for too many years.

I am so out of touch that I can't understand everything I'm hearing. Perhaps I'm too afraid to listen because it seems to jeopardize the life I've worked so hard to create: all the new things, the bigger house, the deluxe car, the perfect suburban lifestyle.

The irony is, my effort has been misplaced. I'm beginning to believe there is more value in simpler achievements. I can't put any of these things on my résumé, but here's what I've done since the campfire:

- Taught my two sons how to play golf and tennis.
- Read children's books.
- Made paper airplanes.
- Went bodysurfing.
- Got a sunburn.
- Ate lunch at a park.
- Changed a flat tire — and enjoyed it.
- Vacuumed out the minivan for my wife.
- Learned how to hold my tongue.

- Watched a "Scooby Doo" cartoon.
- Wrestled on the ground with my boys.

I know that I am becoming a better man. I also know that I have a long way to go.

I'm 39 years old and I feel like I am starting over. This time, however, I'm not going to be defined by my work. I am more than that. I am a father and a husband, who still needs to listen a little harder.

*(Dave Hansen is a former director of communications at a wireless startup and a former journalist. He is living with his family in temporary quarters in Sammamish.)*

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