

## Ask Your Therapist

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### **Support for the Unemployed and Underemployed**

In many parts of the world, when you are introduced to a new person their first question is about where you come from; who is your family and where are they from? In most Western, Europeanized countries, the first question is: What do you do for work?

Our identity, our sense of value, is deeply connected to what we do in the world. I am thinking of a client who started therapy referring to herself as “just a stay-at-home Mom” and evolved into seeing herself as the “CEO of a small organization whose main function is keeping the members of the group sufficiently supported so that they are able to achieve their highest level of functioning and contributing in the world”.

Part of her work was redefining what she did and properly valuing it. Part was changing her language to reflect the things we value in our culture, in language that reflects those values.

I am seeing some parallels in the un- or underemployed people I meet. They are asking themselves the following questions: Who am I without my job? What is my value as a human Being rather than a human Doing? How can I get over the shame/anger/fear/depression I feel from losing my job? How do I get over the shame/anger/fear/depression I feel about having to look for/take a much smaller/less prestigious/less well paid job when my life/lifestyle is set up so differently? How do I downsize? What do I do if I can't downsize fast enough? What was the point of all that education I put myself through?

Finding meaning in life beyond work is a key to surviving these times. Who are you in your family? Community? Place of worship? As a neighbor? Volunteer? What do you have to give as a human Being?

Although this is a terrible time economically, it is a very good time to look inside and get to know your Self. Get to know all of your feelings and accept them. We carry lots of feelings, not just the socially accepted and rewarded ones. Acknowledging the darker, heavier ones can be a relief and a step towards more authenticity in your life.

Don't give in to any desire to isolate yourself from the company and support of others (although it is wise to avoid the company of those who are not supportive). Isolation is often the result of feeling shame and there is no reason to feel ashamed for being without a job right now. You are in very good company!

Next month I will be writing about Stress Reduction for these times.

To read all the prior Ask Your Therapist columns go to [www.krishnabai.com](http://www.krishnabai.com) where you can also send Krishnabai a general question for her column.

Krishnabai, MSW is a therapist in Ashby and Wellesley Hills where she sees adults, older teens and couples. The core of her work is the discovery and expression of the Authentic Self. She focuses on the identification, expression, and resolution of emotions, commitment to honesty and the use of remedial education and information. The Ashby Center for Counseling 978-827-1181.