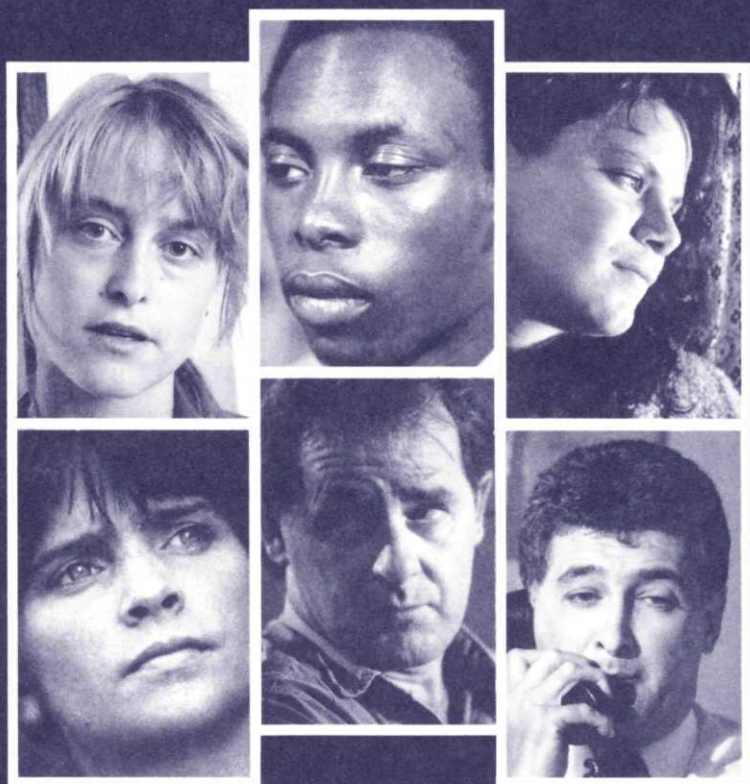


From the National Film Board of Canada

WITHOUT Work

Putting a human face on issues of work and unemployment



USER'S GUIDE

for six 15-minute dramatic discussion starters
for the classroom and small groups



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of Canada

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du Canada

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ISBN No. 0-7722-0176-5

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Portraying the “real-life” situations of a range of people out of work, these dramas will be catalysts for discussion on attitudes towards employment and unemployment, work as a social issue, and options and solutions for the 1990s and beyond.

Recommended for:

- **The secondary classroom (Grades 10-13)**
 - Family Life Education
 - Guidance, Vocational Guidance
 - Social Studies (Contemporary Issues)
 - Economics
 - Values/Ethics education
- **College and university**
 - Students and teachers in the helping professions
 - Economics
 - Sociology
 - Teacher Education
- **Social service professionals**
- **Church and community organizations**
- **Social justice and anti-poverty committees**
- **Community-based adult education**

Why are issues of work so important?

“Self-esteem is bound so closely to work. To begin to take charge of their lives, teenagers need more than just an awareness of current realities. They need room to voice their hopes, fears and other feelings, and guidance for reflection, discussion, debate and action.”

— **The *Without Work* series’ producers**

Work has huge personal and social significance for the individual in all western societies. A job provides us with a place in the social order, and a role as a participating member of our society.

Work is central to our personal identity. As well as obvious economic benefits, it can provide us with a sense of accomplishment and usefulness, fulfillment, and self-esteem. The job we hold can determine how we feel about ourselves, and often provides the basis for judgements other people form about us. Society attributes honor and dignity to those who can earn their own living. The loss of a job can be emotionally devastating, and result in a sense of worthlessness and despair.

Because of the significance of work, changing patterns of employment can have immense personal and social costs. The world recession of the 1970s, government response to rising inflation in the 1980s, and the implications of widespread technological change, have all had an impact on employment and poverty. As industries merge, streamline, and automate, jobs are being eliminated or displaced at great human cost. New skills are being required as organizations adopt new technologies. As the work force struggles to respond to changing opportunities in the job market, certain grim realities emerge. For the young and inexperienced, changes have meant fewer opportunities in a more specialized and technologically demanding work world. The older employee who is laid off faces greater difficulty in breaking back into an evolving work place. And, for those who, for reasons of systemic discrimination for example, are considered to be “less employable,” securing a job has become just that much harder.

For the individual, it means coping with change, modifying attitudes and values, altering expectations and priorities, and possibly redirecting energies. Society, in turn, must react swiftly and wisely, to enable individuals to adapt to changing realities, and to seek new options for work and survival, in a climate of self-respect.

The **Without Work** dramas will spark discussion, reflection, and debate that can:

- foster an understanding of the significance of work and unemployment, and of factors influencing employment patterns
- prompt consideration of the ethical dimensions of unemployment and the right to work
- promote a questioning of personal and societal values, priorities, and assumptions
- dispel stereotypes about work, unemployment, and the unemployed, thus laying the groundwork for attitudinal change
- help teenagers learn how to analyze situations and opportunities, and to find creative options for responding or coping
- focus on ways that society and its institutions can move to help individuals adapt to changing work realities
- provide the foundation for creative personal choice-making, and for progressive social action

NOT BY CHOICE

This compelling film dramatizes the plight of a young single mother who is trying to find work. Portrayed are the complex emotional and social implications of unemployment, and the desperate dilemma she faces as she discovers that the job she must accept will pay her less, after working expenses, than she receives on welfare.

Issues:

- the financial and emotional pressures of single motherhood
- teenage pregnancy
- bureaucracy of the welfare system
- the spiral of poverty

THE DRIVE AWAY

This drama focuses on the cycle of chronic unemployment for a small rural family. Twenty years earlier, when many of his peers had left for the big city in search of opportunity, the father of this family had chosen to stay put. Now, as seasonal unemployment once more hits a critical point, Jackie, the eldest son, wants to break away. In the end, Jackie lets himself be seduced by a questionable ethic that maintains the status quo. Just who does grab the opportunity of a "drive away" is the surprising twist in this story.

Issues:

- regional disparities
- seasonal, cyclical unemployment
- long-term effects of joblessness
- personal ethics and choice

THE BUDDY SYSTEM

This film considers two cases of prejudice and job discrimination. A positive and determined young black man rents a room from a gifted young white man who, because of a mental disorder, is “unemployable.” Though cynical, and critical of a society that provides him with a living allowance rather than a job that he desperately craves, he helps the young black man prepare a proper resume. As the persistent young Fijian continues to encounter bigotry in his job hunt, the situations of the two men begin to merge, despite their very different “handicaps.”

Issues:

- discrimination against minorities or those perceived as different (racial minorities, the disabled, the homeless, immigrants, etc.)
- the right to work
- personal support networks

SIDETRACKED

Peter Hayes, an older man laid off after 18 years of employment, has been without work for a long time. Caught in a tangle of pride and shame, and overwhelmed by confused emotions, he slides into family violence. The drama shows his struggle to understand what’s happening to him, and to regain his lost principles.

Issues:

- social ramifications of joblessness (eg. despair, alienation, substance abuse, violence)
- impact of new technologies on employment
- forced early retirement
- grieving as part of job loss

IS EVERYONE HERE CRAZY

Carmen, a clever, enthusiastic college graduate, begins a job search. An interview on which she had pinned her hopes — for a job that would draw on her training and talents — turns out to be disappointing. Upset and confused, Carmen realizes that she is also broke. She **must** have a job in order to pay her rent. Her roommates persuade her to apply for unemployment payments. Although reluctant, Carmen remains hopeful and optimistic — only to find herself increasingly immersed in a maze of government unemployment bureaucracy.

Issues:

- youth unemployment
- under-employment
- “needing the experience to get the job/needing the job to get the experience”
- bureaucracy of the unemployment insurance system
- attitudes that can empower or disempower individuals

KILLING TIME

Walter Harman, a kind and generous man who manages a restaurant, is suddenly fired. The stated reason is that he is “not in keeping with the new look” of planned changes. The real reason is his age. In shock, Walter drifts in and out of fantasies that reflect his complicated emotions and fears. Between the fantasies, Walter struggles to come to terms with the discrepancies between 15 years of success on the job, his original dreams, his family responsibilities, and the loss of his job.

Issues:

- prejudice based on age
- society’s youth-oriented values
- complications of job loss for the older worker

SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR RESEARCH

- What factors affect employment patterns? What factors are of particular influence in your region?
- Who becomes unemployed? What is it like to be unemployed?
- What are your personal experiences of unemployment and the unemployed? What images do you hold of the unemployed?
- What are society's attitudes towards the unemployed? What kinds of beliefs and fears underlie such attitudes? What are the effects of such attitudes?
- What images of work and unemployment are advanced by the media? Consider, for example, media images of what constitutes a desirable life-style.
- What is the bias of each drama in this series? What assumptions and attitudes are influencing the character(s)? Are there creative options that each main character could take to improve his or her situation?
- What could be some positive things about being without work?
- How have new technologies affected work and unemployment?
- If we recognize that unemployment is a problem of the whole society, what kinds of perceptual, attitudinal and behavioral changes could begin to alleviate some of the problems related to unemployment?
- What personal initiatives or options might help alleviate unemployment, or better spread employment among the population?
- Discuss the pros and cons of some of these measures that have been proposed to reduce unemployment problems:
 - job sharing, rotation layoffs, voluntary early retirement, extended vacations;
 - greater support and training for small-business entrepreneurs;
 - emphasis on small-scale local or community development as opposed to mega-projects;
 - creating subsidies for employers willing to create jobs for young people;
 - guaranteed annual income with a work and educational incentive;
 - systems supporting self-employment;
 - cooperatively run work centers where small businesses share the overhead;
 - programs that support self-reliance among the unemployed;
 - make-work projects; cooperative education.

What other options could be considered?

DISCUSSION AND DEBATE

Some common assumptions, prejudices, and stereotypes

- Unemployed people are lazy, and out to defraud the system.
- Unemployed people have no one to blame but themselves.
- Unemployed people are personally responsible for and deserving of their poverty.
- People who work hard are virtuous.
- Unemployed people would rather live on unemployment insurance or welfare.
- There's a job out there for anyone who wants to work.
- People who can't find a job just aren't trying hard enough.
- Any job is better than no job.
- Women don't have to work; they've got it good at home. Only men have to work.
- Immigrants cause unemployment. They should go back to their countries.
- Those-who-have-money are superior; those-who-have-not are inferior.
- It's not what you know, but who you know.
- Get an education and you'll get a job.
- Young people don't want to work. There's something really wrong with the new generation.
- Most racial minorities cannot adjust to the "white" working world because of their culture and values.
- Technology dominates jobs.
- Technology guarantees progress.
- No longer is big necessarily better, more productive or more profitable.
- What's good for business is good for the country and good for people.
- Making do with less means you're a failure.
- People who choose to live marginally, and make do with less, are weird.
- There's nothing government can do to reduce unemployment.
- Unions are to blame for unemployment.
- Government interference in the marketplace causes unemployment.
- Economics has nothing to do with ethics.
- More economic growth would solve all our problems.

HOW TO OBTAIN THE *WITHOUT WORK* SERIES

A special **VHS Video Package** groups the six dramas on three half-hour videocassettes. The videos, accompanied by this **User's Guide**, are contained in a sturdy video-shelf slip case.

To purchase the **Without Work VHS Video Package** (order number 193C 0189 146), please write to:

**NFB Customer Services, D-10
P.O. Box 6100, Station A
Montreal, Quebec H3C 3H5**

These videos may also be purchased in beta and 3/4" formats. The individual dramas, each about 15 minutes long, are also available on 16 mm film.

The series was made with writers, directors and producers from the National Screen Institute's DramaLAB '87.

Produced and distributed by the National Film Board of Canada.

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