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### Former space industry workers illustrate need for Plan B

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Arlene Riggins Simmons didn't think she'd be among the more than 1,000 workers let go from Kennedy Space Center in October.

But in a way, she's glad that it happened. She's starting her own business, Ajoin, an online retail store that will sell sunglasses, jeans, T-shirts, baked goods and other miscellaneous items. She's pushing to launch it Feb. 1.

"I think it was time to start," said Simmons, 51, of Rockledge, Fla., who worked at the space center for more than 20 years. She is still looking for a full-time job. "Starting earlier would have been really good, but it's OK. God has given me the opportunity to really put time into Ajoin.

"I've always hoped to establish my own business, and that's where I'm taking Ajoin," she added.

Many people think about what to do next, or what to do "just in case," especially in an economy when job stability seems to be a thing of the past. Some think about going back to school, opening a business or working in another field.

**Some make a change as a result of the economic climate, such as Alburn White, 51, of Palm Bay, who enrolled full-time in the occupational therapy assistant program at Keiser University-Melbourne in August 2009. He had been a real estate associate and mortgage broker.**

**"Real estate and mortgage just came to a sudden stop," he said. "I figured the medical field is usually recession-proof, and my brother works in occupational therapy."**

Others simply want a change, like Angela Moore, 54, of Palm Bay, a recent empty nester, who is pursuing a master's degree in counseling at Webster University-Melbourne after years of owning a print shop. She wants to eventually sell the shop and become a grief counselor.

"I hit a point where I wanted to go do something else," Moore said. "I decided I can make a difference in this area."

Regardless of the reason, career experts say developing a Plan B is critical, no matter what line of work you are in and how comfortable you feel in your job.

Few industries are recession-proof and solid, said Wendy S. Enelow, a career consultant and trainer and co-author of "Expert Resumes for Career Changers." "Today you'll hear that industry X is nice and solid, and tomorrow some catastrophe happens."

Susan Guarneri, of Three Lakes, Wis., who calls herself the Career Assessment Goddess, put it another way.

"The only people I know who have job security are the pope and the queen of England.

"What this means is that you have to be your own advocate in terms of figuring out what really would be best career fits for you."

Coming up with a Plan B can be challenging. But once you do, you'll be less panicky about the prospect of losing your job and more prepared for whatever happens, career experts say. You'll feel empowered and look at your next move as an adventure, a chance to do something else.

Ernie Bianco, 43, of Rockledge, turned leaving the space center into an opportunity to open a restaurant with his brother Donald, who is a chef. Ernie Bianco was considering taking a voluntary buyout offer in August 2009 and asked his brother for ideas for a restaurant. His brother started rattling off the names of sandwiches and dishes he had created in his head.

The theme came together and the brothers opened Bianco's Big League Eatery in Rockledge in July.

Ernie Bianco said he had always thought about owning a sandwich shop but never thought it would happen.

"I received an impressive buyout package and I thought it was a good time to take the leap," he said.

Of course, Plan B depends somewhat on socioeconomic class, Enelow said. People who are living paycheck-to-paycheck and lose their job, it's, "How quickly can I get another job" as opposed to someone who has money saved, receives a nice severance package or is employed and has the luxury of spending time finding the right opportunity.

But by proactively managing your career, you're going to have real job security because the security is going to be within you, said Guarneri, who has an online career coaching business. She said that leads to less anxiety and more self-confidence.

So how do you figure out your next move? With the shuttle program coming to an end and Brevard County's latest unemployment rate at 12.6 percent and a new year about to begin, experts offered their advice.

**Examine your life**

Start with the Seven Stories exercise, suggested Kate Wendleton, president of The Five O'Clock Club, a career coaching and outplacement network. An abbreviated version: Make a list of accomplishments in your life, things you enjoyed doing and that you did well. These can be from childhood, volunteer work, your career, hobbies. Rank them in order and analyze them. "See what the threads are that are running throughout them, such as writing, leading, computers, whatever," she said.

She also recommended creating a 15-year vision. Take a look at your life now and then imagine it in five years and then 15 years. Ask yourself, how would your life be different from the way it is now? What would you be doing? Where would you be living? What would your hobbies and interests be? Then, ask yourself how you feel about your entire life as it appeared in your vision.

**Assess your skills**

Broaden your idea of who you are, said Steve Langerud, director of professional opportunities at DePauw University in Greencastle, Ind., and a private workplace consultant. He suggested asking yourself questions like: What are the things that you really need in your professional life to thrive and be successful? What are the issues and topics you want to spend time on? What are the skills you've developed that you actually want to use in your next career? Who are the people you want in your professional life? What kind of environment do you need to be in to sustain your energy?

You should end up with something along the lines of "I need to use these skills to work on these issues and with these people in this environment," he said.

Ask friends and family for their advice, said John P. Strelecky, author of "The Why Cafe," a book about self-discovery. "What do I do well? What's different about me than everyone else? What's my single greatest gift?"

Once you start asking questions, your subconscious will provide some answers, he said.

**Build a network**

Plan B begins and ends with networking, said Garrett Miller, author of "Hire On a WHIM: Four Qualities That Make for Great Employees." And that goes beyond LinkedIn and Facebook.

"Networking is in a sense being humble enough to let people know that if there are opportunities, you're always on the market, you're always looking to grow," he said. "It's a perfect time to do those informational interviews with people you know: 'What do you do? Do you like what you do? What did you need to do to prepare for your current position?'"

Network within your company as well, said Janine Moon, a career coach in Columbus, Ohio, and author of "Career Ownership: Creating 'Job Security' in Any Economy." Get to know other people in the office and learn about other parts of the business.

"The thing about a Plan B is to always be aware of where you can provide better value, more value," she said.

Join local and national professional associations for your area of interest, become active in online discussion groups. Consider becoming a part of civic organizations to meet other people face-to-face, Moon said.

"The idea is to develop a network of people who will be your connections through life, as opposed to creating a network where people can help you find the next job," he said.

**Get prepared**

Ask yourself: If I were to lose my job, where would I start looking? Enelow suggested. There are so many new jobs that people don't know about, and many opportunities for self-employment, she said.

Think about your No. 1 reason for working. (Money is not the answer for everybody, she said). How much money do you need? What is your risk tolerance? How much money do you have saved?

Start reading job descriptions for your industry, suggested Laura DeCarlo, president of Career Directors International, who lives in Melbourne. Do you meet the qualifications? Are there things you need to work on? Were you grandfathered in without a certificate or license but will need it to get another job?

Make sure everything is up to date, resume (which should be about value, not job duties, according to Guarneri), cover letters, LinkedIn profile 100 percent complete, etc., Enelow said. Have a list of companies you would want to work for. If you want to do something else, consider taking career assessments or going on a vocation vacation, she said. Start researching the jobs you are interested in.

"If you don't have a current resume, you're not prepared," Enelow said. "You're not prepared for that unexpected magnificent once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that might present itself to you," she said.

You're also leaving yourself open to the company's whims, she said.

**Have faith**

Trust that good things are going to happen, Strelecky said. Have faith and take the step - often the path people are looking for is that one step into the unknown, he said.

"When people are in a situation where things seem nebulous, like they may lose their job or need to start a new career path, it's like looking into a really thick fog," he said. "The discomfort comes from not knowing where the path leads, or what's on the other side. If you stay where you're at, all you'll ever see is the dense fog, and all you'll feel is the discomfort."

Richard Holmes, 31, took the step when he walked into Everest University-Melbourne near his house and within a week was starting school. He received his diploma in medical assisting last year and is now working at Osler Medical. Prior, he was doing lawn care and his income was not stable.

"I didn't have a clue how I was going to do it or what I was going to do until I walked in and asked," he said. As for Bianco, he's not looking back. Business is going well - it's busy but enjoyable," he said. "The aerospace industry is a comfortable living. You have to be willing to leave and not look back or you'll second guess yourself."