

Edward Zold
[REDACTED]
San Francisco, CA [REDACTED]

Diseased Pariah News
c/o Men's Support Center
P.O. Box 30564
Oakland, CA 90604

September 11, 1997

Dear Editor:

The AIDS epidemic is practically over, as Andrew Sullivan and other enlightened reporters have declared. Triple-combination therapy has relegated HIV to a pesky little bug, little more than an annoyance. Researchers, epidemiologists and government officials are declaring victory in jubilant television news stories and glib newspaper articles. Programs to make drugs available are being expanded. Many people living with HIV are being encouraged to start therapy as soon as possible.

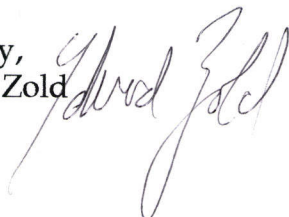
Meanwhile, media-machines are smoking and full-page newspaper advertisements are running, promoting workshops on "Going Back to Work." Simplistic seminars gloss over important facts, especially the difficulties that people experience in trying to get back into the work force after a long absence.

My latest feature-piece, *Get To Work, Bitch: An Alternative Career Guide for PWAs and AIDS Activists*, is a tongue-in-cheek employment guide for PWAs. It takes a humorous look at the issues facing PWAs who are feeling better and considering what to do with their relatively good health and free time. The article explores the real issues facing PWAs reentering the work force while exploring a dozen not so serious career options.

I am a PWA, a veteran AIDS activist and writer. I have written several articles for the Bay Area Reporter on AIDS activism (Health Perspectives Column). I have enclosed a copy of the article for your consideration and a SASE for return of the document or other correspondence.

Thank you for considering my work. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Edward Zold



Edward Zold

San Francisco, CA

Get to Work, Bitch: An Alternative Career Guide for PWAs and AIDS Activists

by Edward Zold

Now that I'm swallowing pills by the handful and staying awake a whopping 14 hours a day, I'm realizing that I'm...well, fucked. Despite the fact that I'm healthy and happy for the first time in years, I've discovered that the generous sum of \$640 that I receive each month from our most thoughtful government hardly cuts it. While this pittance barely cuts it for a homebound person with a foot in the grave, its ridiculously inadequate for a healthy, happy and horny young man in San Francisco.

As I considered this dilemma over the course of my daily coffee/cigarettes/newspaper reading/wondering what to do with my life ritual, I stumbled upon something remarkable in the local gay tattler. Remembering that I had 900/976 block on my phone, my excitement disappeared and I kept reading.

Three pages later, the powers of the universe reached me. Right there, after the porn movie reviews and before the headless model/escort ads was a giant, full page ad for a career workshop for PWAs looking to "re-enter" the work force. "Work," I repeatedly mumbled with grave sadness for several days.

In a bored, hungry stupor two weeks later, I decided to check it out.

What I found was beyond appalling. In fact, the folks running this thing were so far out in left field that it was downright funny. There was no acknowledgment of drug side effects and sustained immune system damage

which still made some people feel ill, regardless of their viral load and CD4 numbers; no awareness that many people needed extensive education and training to acquaint themselves with the myriad new computer systems and technological advances in their old professions; no hints on how to explain a massive gap on a resume; no concept of how difficult it might be to obtain Social Security Benefits a second time, should a return-to-work adventure not be a success; and (perhaps most astounding) no cautionary note on how these drugs could stop working at any time. We therefore might find ourselves run-down and unable to work next week, next month or at any time, really.

As I became aware of these troubling oversights in standard 'Get Back to Work' propaganda, I began to consider alternative careers. I was drawn to jobs that could be done by PWAs without further education or training, using the skills that we have employed in day-to-day life to survive illness.

I do believe in sharing, so here goes:

1. **Funeral Director** : If you got into the game before these new drugs, you probably have been to enough good ones and bad ones to know this business like the back of your hand. Just get yourself a yellow pages ad and GO!
2. **Writing those books about how to get free stuff from different places**: You know, how to get a cheap bus pass, free food, etc.. Be sure to include a section on places that appear to provide services and products but don't.
3. **Crash test dummy**: Come on, we've made it through the mother of all fender-benders already - how much worse could it be? Just call Detroit and tell 'em to give ya what they got.
4. **Compliance Consultant**: Market those activist skills in this exciting new field. Actually, it isn't new; I think that this job used to be called 'wise guy.' Just quit givin' away your outrage, intelligence and vindictiveness and start selling it!

5. **Triple-combo cocktail waitress:** The International Conference in Geneva is less than a year away!! You can work all of the drug-company sponsored soirees, do room service at the hotels and do the big bashes honoring guys like Fauci and David Ho!! Remember, the stars of this show have big money behind them, it'll be nothing but tips, tips, tips.
6. **Travel agent/ leisure consultant:** : Anyone who has been feeling better and looking for stuff to do or any of us who blew all of our cash like there was no tomorrow will know the best shopping, clubbing and hot spots around the globe. Just spread the word, baby.
7. **HMO executive:** Ever look at all of those people less sick than you in your public health clinic or HMO waiting room and want to knock them back in (or even out of) line? Here's your chance to do it AND get paid for it!!!
8. **Time/Life book consultant:** Entire series are begging to be written based on our experiences!! For example: How to treat life threatening illnesses yourself because you can't see a doctor at your overcrowded, cheap-ass HMO or broke down public health system; How to Live High if You Think that You Might Die; How to Survive on Next to Nothing, or How to Sit on Your Ass, Do Nothing and Get Paid (for the last one, you can just plagiarize the training manual that your local AIDS 'Case Manager' used!)
9. **HMO Doctor:** Come on, I've never met a PWA who wasn't at least twice as qualified as a Kaiser doc. Just strut on into the HR department and tell them your ready. If you're ever asked to produce an actual degree (which is highly unlikely), just flash a copy of the warranty certificate your VCR or stereo. Better yet, tell them that it's being logged into some other department. The way these places operate, it'll be years before anyone is onto you.

10. Nursing home/ cruise line chef: Now really, who'd know how to make non diarrhea inducing, non gut-burning meals for people who aren't really even hungry than a cocktail-popping, Lomotil munching, Immodium swilling PWA? Even if we're just talking Saltines and Jello, we're still talking big money.

11. Writer/storyteller for retarded people: Just think back to the last time an Social Security Administration employee wrote to or spoke with you and imitate their writing or speech. Guaranteed success awaits you -- you'll be famous in every group home from coast to coast.

12. Linguistics Professor: Teach people how to speak in doublespeak, the international funny-business language for the 1990's. Just pick up some promotional/fundraising materials for your local AIDS service provider or some literature about the effects of the drugs that you're taking and read them over twice. Just read aloud from them to groups, call it a 'lecture' and watch the cash roll in.

Of course, if none of these spin your wheels and more 'traditional' careers aren't appealing either, just forget about it. Drug side effects, a very uncertain future and a life threatening disease are still GOOD EXCUSES not to work. Besides, we've earned a few extra 'golden years,' haven't we? I'm taking mine.