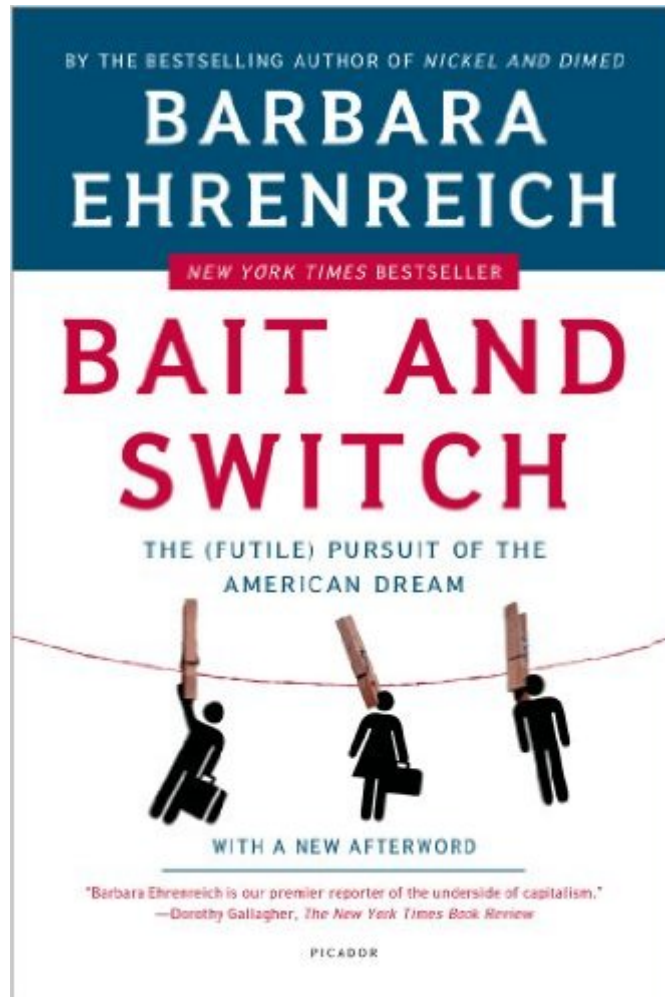


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Bait And Switch: The (Futile) Pursuit Of The American Dream



Synopsis

The New York Times bestselling investigation into white-collar unemployment from "our premier reporter of the underside of capitalism" •The New York Times Book Review

Americans' working lives are growing more precarious every day. Corporations slash employees by the thousands, and the benefits and pensions once guaranteed by "middle-class" jobs are a thing of the past. In *Bait and Switch*, Barbara Ehrenreich goes back undercover to explore another hidden realm of the economy: the shadowy world of the white-collar unemployed. Armed with the plausible résumé of a professional "in transition," she attempts to land a "middle-class" job. She submits to career coaching, personality testing, and EST-like boot camps, and attends job fairs, networking events, and evangelical job-search ministries. She is proselytized, scammed, lectured, and—again and again—rejected. *Bait and Switch* highlights the people who have done everything right—gotten college degrees, developed marketable skills, and built up impressive résumés—yet have become repeatedly vulnerable to financial disaster. There are few social supports for these newly disposable workers, Ehrenreich discovers, and little security even for those who have jobs. Worst of all, there is no honest reckoning with the inevitable consequences of the harsh new economy; rather, the jobless are persuaded that they have only themselves to blame. Alternately hilarious and tragic, *Bait and Switch*, like the classic *Nickel and Dimed*, is a searing exposé of the cruel new reality in which we all now live.

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Customer Reviews

Ehrenreich might as well be telling my story from 2002 to the present. Years of top grades, honors

programs, a top 10 MBA, 'investment' in student loans, a good professional start--ending in long term unemployment followed by underemployment when the industry I was working in crashed in 2001-2002. Unlike Ehrenreich, I've had more time to consider why a good education can be so meaningless if something bad happens during your career. Anyone, REALLY ANYONE, can go from being the best and the brightest to essentially unemployable in their field within 6 months--irrespective of their confidence that they are the type of person with hard won skills that will always be able to get a good job. People who have not experienced this for themselves will not believe it, because it is too uncomfortable to believe. But this is how markets really work. Customers in a grocery will buy perfect vegetables and skip over the ones with visible bruises until they are sold at a deep discount. Hiring managers do the same thing. Candidates must be unblemished by any concern or question, including hiring gaps or rapid job moves, or unusual industry changes. So for many, the system is broken at many levels. Education does not meet the needs of the future employed. It is too costly and of too poor a direct relevance to compete with educational systems and hiring criteria overseas. The process of hiring people remains superficial and flawed (Peter F. Drucker has some very good data to verify this to be true) but it is what it is and probably will not change any time soon. Most managers hire on the basis of positive inside references, directly related previous work experience, and enthusiasm and good interpersonal rapport during an interview--if you are lucky enough to get an interview.

Barbara Ehrenreich's latest work of social commentary, "Bait and Switch: The (Futile) Pursuit of the American Dream," is an indictment of the "magisterial indifference of the corporate world." Posing as an unemployed white-collar worker, Ehrenreich adopts an alias and markets herself as a public relations person and event planner. Her goal is to obtain a corporate job that pays approximately fifty thousand a year with health benefits. She plans to keep the job for three or four months, write about her experiences, and then quit. The author sets aside five thousand dollars for travel and other expenses connected with her job search. During her odyssey, Ehrenreich pays for career coaching, attends a job fair, posts her resume on Internet sites, enrolls in a boot camp for job seekers, and networks extensively. She learns to sell herself, treat job searching as a full-time job, always maintain a winning attitude, put her faith in God, and dress for success. Much to her surprise, Ehrenreich's efforts do not land her a suitable job. She asks herself: Do I lack charisma? Am I too old? Is it unrealistic in today's market to look for a decent job with health benefits? The author acknowledges that any or all of the above may have been factors in her failure to find work. However, she wrote the book because she believes that there is a bigger problem holding

job-seekers back--corporate America's indifference to the needs of its workers. Ehrenreich maintains that human resources departments rarely even acknowledge receiving a resume anymore. Even worse, when an applicant sends in a bid for a job, he is often the victim of "bait and switch" tactics.

It's commonly assumed in the United States that if you go to college, get a job and work hard, you will be successful. You will own a house and a couple of cars, you will be able to afford medical care, and you will be able to educate your children to a level where they're guaranteed even more success than you've achieved. If this was ever true, it isn't anymore, and Barbara Ehrenreich shows us the results. In her first book, *NICKEL AND DIMED*, Ehrenreich went undercover as an unskilled worker to learn how the lowest level of workers supports themselves. They don't, she learned, because the system doesn't work, and her second book shows that the system doesn't work for the business classes either. Here, Ehrenreich poses as an out-of-work PR executive and details her job search. Franz Kafka joined forces with Charles Darwin to create the brutal, surreal corporate world the author discovers. People are downsized, laid off, forced into early retirement, and just plain fired as a matter of course in this brave new world of ours, for reasons as pointed as ageism and sexism, as arbitrary as a profitable company wanting to show more of a profit, or for no reason at all. Of course, even knowing the fragile task of holding a job in this environment, the human resources departments hold the job-seeker responsible for every unemployed minute. Working time lost to illness is unemployment, working time lost to child or elder care is unemployment, working as a consultant is unemployment. Unemployment is unemployment, and the longer such periods last, the blacker the mark against the prospective employee.

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