Someone once said to me, "Most of my job opportunities have come from random breaks." And many people have told me about the power of networking. I found both to be true for me.

I have a Bachelor's degree in biology and 14 years' experience in medical manufacturing. After a 21 year "gap" of raising kids, I needed to go back to work. I figured I would be lucky to get a part-time, minimum wage job stocking shelves somewhere. Twenty one years is a LONNNGGGG time in a fast-moving technical field like biotech.

But an older woman at church who I'd never noticed before struck up a conversation with me one day, asking me what I do. I said, "Well, I used to be in medical manufacturing…" She exclaimed, "That's what I do, too!" Turns out, she does medical writing, part-time and freelance. She sent me a link to a biotech job search email list, and recommended that I go to a weekly evening job search class and a biweekly biotech networking group that she knew of.

A few days later, the email list advertised the B.E.S.T. course at Miramar College. I figured that would give me something to put on my resume that wasn't in the last century (⯑), and I signed up for the next session. In the meantime, the weekly job search class really opened my eyes about how to look for employment nowadays. Last time I applied for a job (in 1988!), I looked in the want ads (dead tree, not online), mailed in my resume (on fancy "resume paper"), waited by the phone so I wouldn't miss a call, and went into the interview "cold" (no info about who I was meeting, and not much info about the company). Now there's LinkedIn, which was fantastic. I had been worried about not having any references; on LinkedIn, I was able to find and reconnect with my first boss ever, as well as my most recent boss. They both graciously gave me recommendations and advice.

The BEST workshop was great. It covered some skills that I knew, and some that were new to me. One of the best things about it was the feeling of comfort and confidence it gave me. I felt completely at home in the lab. I felt like I'd maybe been away a couple of years, rather than a couple of decades. And it showed; the professor asked me if I'd done cell culture before (I hadn't), and said I have good "lab hands".

Once I had the workshop on my resume, I started actually applying to various jobs. I didn't hear anything, so I thought I would follow some advice and go through a temp agency. The first recruiter I spoke to was very enthusiastic until he heard how long I'd been gone; then he got all cold and awkward and ended the phone call. I met a second recruiter in person; he was more polite and said he would try, but that it would be "more difficult" to place me. I never heard back from him.

Then I got an email from the workshop professor. She has a side business, selling clothing at triathlons. An older woman had come up to her booth to buy a running top, and they got to talking. Turns out, the

customer had just come out of retirement to be the VP of Technology at a start-up, and she needed a part-time intern to do some online market research for her. Talk about random! My professor thought it would be a good way for me to get my foot in the door, and she highly recommended me as a candidate. When I sent in my resume, the VP thought, "This looks like the sort of person our Operations VP needs!" So she forwarded it to him, I interviewed, and boom! I now have a full-time, full-paid job as a "Senior Manufacturing Laboratory Technician"--exactly what I used to do, 20 years ago!

So, network like crazy, but know that it's not all up to you. And have hope! You never know where your next job is coming from.

~Ginny