

If You Don't Have a Job and You're Not Rich, Should You Blame Yourself?

A recent Republican candidate seeking the presidency of the United States said, "If you don't have a job and you're not rich, blame yourself." There was a time in America when, if you worked hard, played by the rules, and had innovative business ideas, the odds of realizing your dreams were in your favour. But now those odds are stacked against you. Thanks to the policies that our policy makers have pursued – and continue to pursue – the following 5 odds are structurally stacked against you, no matter how hard you work these days.

1. **Financing** – It used to be easy for small business to obtain financing and start operations. Now, whereas big business gets all kinds of special tax breaks and deals – including taxpayer bailouts – small business is left holding the short end of the stick. It's practically impossible these days for a small business to get financing from *any* financial institution.
2. **Home Equity** – Once you could borrow against your home. Now, due to mismanagement of risk by financial institutions and lack of regulations, housing values are on a downward slide. Due to no fault of their own, many Americans don't have equity in their homes against which they can borrow and start a business or send their children to college.
3. **Declining Investment in people** – In the past, we always invested more in the education of a new generation relative to a previous generation. Now, for the first time in our nation's history, children will be worse off than their parents.
4. **Student Loans** – College is now out of reach for many Americans due to rising tuition costs. College graduates now leave school with student loan burdens so heavy they can't afford to pay them back, much less buy a house or start a business.
5. **Public Policy** – These days, tax and economic development policies are structurally designed to redistribute income upward, from the bottom to the top. The top 1% now own more than a quarter of all U.S. income and almost one-half of all its wealth. This inequity is a drag on our economy, as the top 1% usually holds on to what they have instead of spending it. Our economy grows through consumer spending. If income and wealth are concentrated at the top, consumer spending – and, hence, our economy – is likely to be stagnant. If our economy is stagnant, jobs and income for ordinary Americans are stagnant. It's a vicious circle.

And the list goes on. Can we really tell people, if you don't have a job and you're not rich you have no one to blame but yourself? Did the value of our homes, our pension plans, our jobs disappear due to any fault of our own? Or is it the result of having implemented wrong-headed policies?

What's the answer? Adequate and equitable funding for public education combined with a fair, stable, and equitable system of taxation and a level playing field for businesses, large and small, is the key to building strong schools, building strong communities, and building a strong economy.

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