

DAILY NEWS

JOB MARKET LOOKING GRIM? START YOUR OWN BUSINESS LIKE THESE NEW YORKERS

BY LORE CROGHAN
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The scary job market has more New Yorkers taking employment into their own hands, launching startups they might never have begun if they still had secure paychecks.

Droves of workers are bouncing back from layoffs - or pre-empting them - by becoming their own boss. For many, the prospect of losing a job has taken away the risk factor, freeing them to follow their passion. And some are finding there is no shortage of free training and help to make sure they get it right.

Here are four stories of New Yorkers making the transition from employee to entrepreneur:

Dressed for success

At least Meki Adefris had advance warning. She found out in December she'd be losing her job as an events and sponsorship manager at Sovereign Bank in Brooklyn Heights. She was ready when they passed out the pink slips in January.

When she got laid off once before, after 9/11, it was depressing.

"I took it much better this time," said Adefris, 35.

From her Prospect Heights, Brooklyn, living room, Adefris is launching a line of Ethiopian-inspired baby and children's clothing. Her company is called Me and Lu, the second part being her 13-month-old daughter's nickname.

The handspun cotton and brightly colored clothes are made in her homeland, where relatives helped her line up a manufacturer in Addis Ababa. She plans to start selling some

items this summer, and the full line next February.

Adefris enrolled in FastTrac, a free, six-day entrepreneurial boot camp run by the city Department of Small Business Services. The program was so popular that more than 200 applicants applied for just 28 seats, prompting the agency to schedule more courses.

"FastTrac will give me more focus, and help me understand the business side of business," she said.

'Neat freak' cleans up

When Bear Stearns imploded, Apolonia Edwards knew her days as an administrative assistant were numbered, so she threw herself into the cleaning business she had going on the side.

"I had enough of job hunting in corporate America," said Edwards, 35, whose Ideal Cleaning Services specializes in clearing out pack rats' apartments and cleaning up after corpses.

"I am a neat freak," she said. "I love to clean."

The Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, resident originally began her business after a post-9/11 layoff from Deutsche Bank. The first year, she did everything herself. Now she has independent contractors clean for her, and pays them by the hour.

Edwards went to the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce for business guidance and soon found membership enhanced her credibility with potential clients.