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PREOCCUPATIONS

CHIARA SFORZA

A New Career That's Warm And Fuzzy

UNTIL last year, I was an assistant vice president in the global cost analysis and support department at Deutsche Bank. I had worked there for eight years. We tracked expenses for the company's global technology projects, reconciled the balance sheet and produced various management reports. I was let go in July 2007, three months after my department moved to Jersey City from New York. Now I'm a dog walker and pet sitter for Fetch Pet Care of New Jersey Gold Coast in Fort Lee.

It was actually a relief when I was finally laid off. The company had notified us in March 2007 that the department was going to be outsourced to Manila, and I couldn't stand the stress of waiting. I've been downsized several times over the years, but I always landed on my feet. Of course, I was in my 30s and 40s then. Now I'm in my 50s, and it makes a difference.

When I applied for other jobs I was over-qualified for the available positions. I was willing to take a pay cut and a lesser title, but no one would give me an opportunity. I had been an accounts-payable supervisor years ago, so I even applied for those positions. Employers were afraid that I would become bored. Deutsche Bank also provided us with the services of an outplacement agency, so I redesigned my résumé with its help. I still had no luck. I was even willing to work as a consultant with no benefits.

After my unemployment ran out, I had to do something; I'm self-supporting. Pet-sitting and dog-walking give me an opportunity to do something different. I'm tired of going to work every day in jobs where I have to worry if my position is going to be outsourced, and the new job is actually working out well. I knew I would have to give up some luxuries to take a job like this, and I was willing to do that.

I met Deborah Jack, who started this Fetch Pet Care franchise, when I needed someone to take care of my cats while I went on a trip. I found the company on the Internet. Deborah was just starting out, and she took care of my cats herself. She did great work. When I couldn't find a job, I e-mailed her about becoming an employee, and she was receptive. I told her that this had to be a full-time job for me, and she said she could

As told to Patricia R. Olsen. E-mail: preoccupations@nytimes.com.



ROB BENNETT FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Chiara Sforza walking Lex, a client's dog, along the Hudson River in Weehawken, N.J. Ms. Sforza formerly worked as an assistant vice president at Deutsche Bank.

keep me busy.

I've been doing this for six months. I'm assigned to seven dogs, which I walk individually. I also pet-sit cats. On the days I work, the company generates a schedule for me. Occasionally, a client will work late and ask me to walk a dog an extra time.

I meet the owners when I start, and we discuss everything I need to know. If clients go on vacation, they may call and ask for status reports. Sometimes I take a photo of their pet and text it to them. If I run into a dog that is hard to handle, Frank Richardone, Deborah's business partner, will take over or assign it to another pet-sitter.

I do miss socializing at the bank. I had a lot of friends there, but most of them have been laid off, too. I'm a people person, so I enjoy the interaction with the pet owners. If someone has a puppy and is a first-time pet owner, I try to reassure them. For example, when puppies are being crate-trained, they often cry when the owner walks into the room. I tell the owners that this is normal and that the puppy usually stops when they leave.

I don't know what I'm going to do about the future. I don't make anywhere near my

corporate salary, but this job is perfect for now. I have a little flexibility because I have savings. Being happy while making some money is more important to me right now than making a lot of money and being miserable. At this stage in my life I'm willing to make the sacrifice.

I've always wanted to do something with pets. In the beginning I had a few doubts about dog-walking because it's so totally different and I didn't know if it would work out. But as the weeks went by, and I built a rapport with the dogs and built a clientele, I realized how happy I was. And it's physically challenging and keeps me in shape.

If someone were to say I took a lower-level job, I'd say I wanted to.

I was burned out and needed a break. This job is fulfilling different needs. When you work in the corporate world, it's not always gratifying when you meet the challenges set in front of you. That's the job; it goes with the territory. But I get so much gratification from walking dogs. They're so appreciative of the simplest things you do for them. No matter how bad my day may be going, when I walk into a home and the dog is so happy to see me and gives me kisses, it puts a different spin on the day. □

**Work outside
the corporate
world fills a
need, for now.**