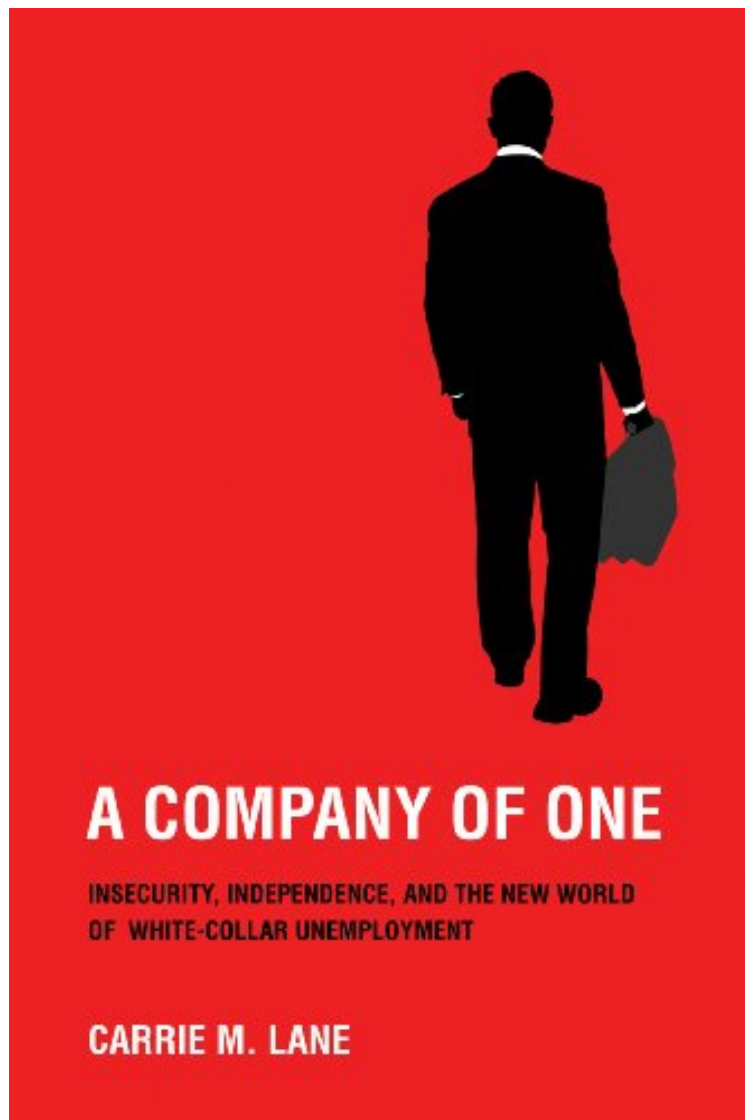


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# A Company of One: Insecurity, Independence, and the New World of White-Collar Unemployment

*Carrie M. Lane*

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Being laid off can be a traumatic event. The unemployed worry about how they will pay their bills and find a new job. In the American economy's boom-and-bust business cycle since the 1980s, repeated layoffs have become part of working life. In *A Company of One*, Carrie M. Lane finds that the new culture of corporate employment, changes to the job search process, and dual-income marriage have reshaped how today's skilled workers view unemployment. Through interviews with seventy-five unemployed and underemployed high-tech white-collar workers in the Dallas area over the course of the 2000s, Lane shows that they have embraced a new definition of employment in which all jobs are temporary and all workers are, or should be, independent "companies of one." Following the experiences of individual jobseekers over time, Lane explores the central role that organized networking events, working spouses, and neoliberal ideology play in forging and reinforcing a new individualist, pro-market response to the increasingly insecure nature of contemporary employment. She also explores how this new perspective is transforming traditional ideas about masculinity and the role of men as breadwinners. Sympathetic to the benefits that this "company of one" ideology can hold for its adherents, Lane also details how it hides the true costs of an insecure workforce and makes collective and political responses to job loss and downward mobility unlikely.

"In *A Company of One*, Carrie Lane reveals ways in which unemployed technology workers seek to manage the uncharted territory between jobs. She documents the strategies these workers use and analyzes the cultural logic through which they understand unemployment. Her analysis reveals the contradictions of an ideology of independence that obscures structural disadvantage and impedes recognition of broader relations of power. . . . Historically and geographically situated, this book helps to explain the resilience of individualism. Ideas about work, Lane shows, can withstand considerable challenge and yet continue to inform both meaning and action." ?Debra Osnowitz, *British Journal of Industrial Relations* (September 2012) "*A Company of One* is a commendable addition to the growing literature on the New Economy. Carrie Lane makes her contribution by focusing on the ideologies and internal thought processes of workers affected by tumultuous employment and the emphasis on career management, rather than just on the documentation of those trends. . . . *A Company of One* is smoothly written, well organized and a pleasure to read. . . . Lane accomplishes what she set out to do, which was to detail how individuals wrap their minds around tumultuous employment and march on." ?Kathryn Densberger, *University of Richmond, The British Sociological Association*(2014)"*A Company of One* is terrific. It is refreshingly direct, carefully researched, well written and organized, framed in a novel and useful fashion, and, of serendipitous if grim circumstance, appears at an opportune time. Carrie M. Lane provides a marvelous summary of critical shifts in career structures and accompanying ideologies, both justifying and supporting increasingly insecure and episodic career paths, told in the voices of job-seeking high-tech workers." ?John Van Maanen, Erwin H. Schell Professor of Organization Studies, MIT "In this rich and sobering book, Carrie M. Lane offers a window into the lived complexities of neoliberalism. Here global high-tech restructuring is unearthed among American white collar middle classes, for whom anxiety, insecurity, and rugged individualism are resounding and sometimes perplexing bedfellows. *A Company of One* is a powerful and prescient ethnography with a subtle reading of gender, class, politics, and the meanings of work and selfhood in times of economic flux." ?Carla Freeman, Winship Distinguished Research Professor of Anthropology and Women's Studies, Emory University About the Author Carrie M. Lane is Professor of American Studies at California State University, Fullerton. She is the author of *A Company of One: Insecurity, Independence, and the New World of White-Collar Unemployment* and coeditor of *Anthropologies of Unemployment: New Perspectives on Work and Its Absence*, both from Cornell.