

BUSINESS

Career advisers say tight job market could be good time to switch companies

With the lowest unemployment rate in the nation, now may be a good time for Minnesotans to think about changing jobs.

By Tom Meersman (<http://www.startribune.com/tom-meersman/10645426/>) Star Tribune |

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A tighter labor market forecast for the region may have CEOs losing sleep, but there's an upside for workers: Now may be an opportune time to seek a promotion or to make that next career move.

"If you are feeling stagnant, bored or generally unhappy and restless, it is a very good time to look elsewhere," said Kay Blassingame, a career counselor at VocationPartner in St. Paul. "Since boomers are retiring, many senior positions are opening up and it is a great time to advance in many industries."

The Twin Cities area in October, with a 2.3 percent unemployment rate, tied with Nashville for the nation's lowest jobless rate, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. As a result, employers have said they are having to get creative to hire new employees and try harder to keep those they have.

Government in particular is facing a massive retirement wave and has been recruiting very actively, Blassingame said. But not all growth is across the board, she warned. Some companies might be turning to technology to address labor shortages.

Freda Marver, a career and executive coach at Begin Again Coaching in St. Louis Park, encourages midcareer professionals to continually track job listings "to see what's out there" and get an idea of the qualifications needed for positions they may seek in the future.

Also, she said, they should network with friends, associates and colleagues. The key is to begin investigating before the formal search begins.

Marver estimates that about a third of her clients make a total career change, a third stay in the same career but find a different employer, and a third end up staying with the same organization.



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indecisive man and lost chooses the right path.
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For those who decide not to change companies, she said, sometimes that means figuring out a different way to manage expectations or engage in the work, or learning new skills or a new way to communicate with a manager.

"If you figure out what's not working and tweak it, that's going to help you no matter what job you're in," she said.

Kim Bartels, an executive coach who works mainly with women, said retiring baby boomers will likely open up jobs at many levels, but the opportunities also may depend on each company's culture.

"Some organizations really try to nurture and draw talent from within so that they can be very careful about succession planning," she said. "Others look to the outside for talent, almost dismissing the managers and leaders they already have."

No time like the present

Either way, the current demographic changes are a good thing for individuals looking to step up in their careers, said Bartels, who runs Bartels Executive Coaching in Minneapolis.

Bartels said her mostly upper-income clients are paying closer attention to their job circumstances than to trends in the economy, and some can afford to stop working for a while as they look for a new job. But many people don't have that luxury, she said, and need to search for a new position while they're still on the job.

In those cases, she advises clients not to tell their bosses or anyone else at work that they're job hunting, and to be especially careful about what they post on Facebook and other social media. On the other hand, she said, job seekers should use social media in a positive way, for example making sure that their LinkedIn profiles are up to date and as professional-looking as possible.

Denise Felder advises many clients at the lower end of the income scale, and said most of them need to be honest with themselves and learn what additional degree or training they may need to advance their careers.

"I tell my clients to not compare yourself to other people, and that you may have different barriers and challenges that the person next to you doesn't have," she said. "It may take twice as long to get something accomplished, but it's still just as good and there are still opportunities for you."

Felder, president of the Minnesota Career Development Association and career adviser at Denise-Mpls Career Services, said many young and midcareer workers are confused or discouraged because they don't have a career identity.

"They're thinking about the current job that they're in, or what else they want to do, or maybe the salary they want or the ability to work closer to home," she said. "But they're not necessarily thinking about what they want to contribute to the workplace and what drives them as a person and what fulfills them."

When workers can think it through and determine their career identities, it is easier for them to chart which direction to take, Felder said.

"Finding any job is easy, but it's finding the right job for you that takes time," she said.

"I tell my clients that you don't have permission to put up with being unhappy and being in a rut," Felder said. "You don't have permission to say that it's too hard, so I'm going to stay in this job that I don't like or in this job that's not paying me enough to support my family."

But don't rush it

However, career coach Stan Rosen suggests that those with good jobs think long and hard before making a switch too hastily.

"I encourage them to really consider why is it they want to change and do they need to change," he said, "and whether they can improve their present situation rather than just running away."

For those on the younger side, that can be especially important, said Rosen, who owns Career Lifestyles in downtown Minneapolis and helps people of all ages looking for work. Anytime is a good time to search if someone is unhappy, he added.

"I get a large number of people around 30 years old and they've already had 10 different jobs," he said. "Eventually that's going to catch up with them if it hasn't already."

Younger professionals may not realize that employers invest in training and value loyalty, so at some point they'll shy away from applicants who aren't likely to commit to a job for more than a year or two.

On the other end of the age scale, Rosen said he advises many in their early or mid-50s who think they need to work for only six or eight more years and may not be enthusiastic about getting the training they need.

"I encourage them to take a look not just at five or 10 years, but to think about their interests and skills over a longer time," he said.

Some late-career professionals who want to switch are concerned about whether they can get hired elsewhere because of their age, Rosen said, but there are many situations where people in that age group can use their experience to start a business or become a consultant, or even to join a corporation looking for more seasoned individuals.

“Age is a matter of how people see it,” Rosen said. “Do you look old, do you feel old, do you act old, and do you dress old?”

That’s not to say there isn’t job discrimination in the marketplace.

But some companies are looking for workers with experience and with a strong work ethic, he said, and older workers should not be discouraged about finding the right spot.

“If you want to keep current and you enjoy being physically and mentally active, there are plenty of opportunities,” he said.

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