

LABOR MARKET REALITIES

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Keep the following trends in mind as you search for your next job and consider your career development journey. They will give you perspective and help you make realistic decisions about your future.

Lifelong employability – Strive to be employable—to have the skills that employers value—so you can find work easily even if you get laid off. Don't expect to have lifelong employment, especially with one company.

Diversity – Appreciate and work with cultural differences. Employers value this skill because the labor market has more women, older people, and people of different races and ethnic groups than ever before.

Computer skills – Develop strong computer skills and update them regularly. Every industry requires workers who do.

Math, Science, and English – Develop strong math, science, and communication skills. Employers always need people.

Customer service – Always demonstrate a positive, helpful attitude toward customers, supervisors and coworkers. Employers value this attitude because gaining and maintaining customers is crucial, especially in a weak economy.

Economy awareness – Pay attention to the local, national, and global market. Jobs are created and destroyed because of technological advances, the economy and corporate restructuring. Prepare for it.

Post high school education – Obtain an education beyond a high school diploma. It's the number one way to achieve and maintain a middle class lifestyle or, in many cases, to be self-supporting. With an advanced education you can remain employable.

Continuous learning – Constantly upgrade your skills. Employers want to know what you learned recently, not what degree you earned ten years ago.

Education costs – Find employers who will help train you. Since the price of college and technical education will continue to rise faster than inflation, academic help is valuable.

Flattened wages – Be aware that many organizations are willing to replace long-tem employees with younger, less-expensive workers. This practice has kept wages flat.

Doing what you love – Focus on work that fulfills and interests you once you begin long-term employment planning. Since job security doesn't exist, you might as well enjoy what you do while you can do it!

Not just 9-5 – Be aware of the pressure to work long hours. Flex time, telework and cell phones have blurred the lines between work and home. Today, Americans work more hours than people in any other industrialized country.

Employer as client – Embrace the new relationship employees have with employers, one that resembles a professional athlete's free agency: "I'll provide my knowledge, skills and abilities in exchange for wages and benefits as long as it suits both of us. The relationship ends when one of us wants out or the contract expires."

High turnover – Expect to have many jobs and in several different occupational areas over a lifetime of work. The old career ladders no longer apply in most occupations, which means you have to make your own decisions about what sort of career path (and therefore training) you need.

Contingency workers – Realize that you may become part of the temporary and contract workforce, now the norm at many companies. That means you'll have lots of flexibility but few benefits and absolutely no security.

Global competition – Prepare yourself to compete with people worldwide for certain jobs. With the Internet, companies can hire people overseas to work for them but remain in their homelands. It's a small, small world!