

# Ten Great Career Choices During a Recession

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2.6 million jobs lost last year. Unemployment edging toward 10 percent. Over 11 million Americans out of work. With numbers like those, it's easy for job seekers to lose hope. But here's a statistic you probably haven't heard: as the economy limped to the end of 2008, there were still roughly 2.8 million job openings across the country. Granted, that represented a 30% drop from the previous year. But it shows that work can still be found, no matter how dire the recession. Here are 10 career choices that will help you get (and keep) a job, even in the toughest of times.

**Focus on industries that grow when the economy shrinks:** In October of 2008, with the economy on the verge of collapse, McDonald's enjoyed a 5.3 percent increase in U.S. sales. A month later, Walmart's sales grew by 3.4 percent. The numbers proved an interesting point: for some industries, recessions are good business. Fast food and discount retailers aren't the only winners. Housing foreclosures and bankruptcies produce work for many businesses, from moving companies to law firms. And rising unemployment leads to increased crime rates, so security-related careers are likely to grow. But what if moving sofas or flipping burgers isn't your idea of a dream job? Remember that these industries often generate plenty of stimulating, higher paying work behind the scenes, in everything from management to marketing.

**Get into a recession-proof field:** People get sick and schools stay open, regardless of the economy. So health care and education are among the most stable careers out there. Recent trends also point to increasing demand in both fields. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, job growth in education will be fueled by a growing student population and an increasing retirement rate among older teachers. And as the Baby Boomer generation ages, their health care needs will also increase. The BLS predicts that in the coming years, nearly half of the 30 fastest growing jobs will be in health services. Many of these jobs, from registered nurse to dental hygienist, only require a two-year degree. So with a relatively small investment of time and money, you can shift to a new career that's likely to need you tomorrow.

**Never stop learning:** Education is key to employment - at every stage of your career. Even if you already have a degree and a stable job, developing new skills can help you keep it - and bounce back if you're ever laid off. Focus on learning marketable skills that are useful in a variety of professions. For example, selling is crucial to success in business, so sales and marketing expertise will increase your value to many employers. With the rise of the Internet and information technology, web design and data management skills will also strengthen your resume. And it's always a good idea to improve your leadership and communication skills. As Peter Manzi, national certified career counselor says, "Become more well-rounded. Develop the ability to lead small groups, to coordinate other people and take control of a project. Learn to

understand people and express yourself clearly and professionally.” If you do, employers will find you irresistible - in good times and bad.

**Get a job that can't be outsourced or automated:** During a typical recession, cost-cutting becomes a high priority for most businesses. During a severe recession, it can become a matter of survival. When the time comes for a company to cut costs, jobs that can be done more cheaply by a machine or foreign worker are likely to be automated or outsourced. To avoid this fate, pursue a career that requires either a human touch, human intelligence, or both. Consider a job that depends on your empathy and physical presence, like sales, physical therapy or veterinary medicine. Or focus on work that requires the kind of creativity or big-picture insight that computers can't easily replicate, like graphic art, business analysis or writing.

**Start your own business:** Surprisingly, a recession can be the ideal time to become your own boss. As big companies scale back marketing and reduce services, dissatisfied customers become more receptive to smaller (and cheaper) alternatives. And since older companies have larger overhead costs, a lean-and-mean start-up can beat their prices and still cut a profit. But what if you have no business experience, no funding, and no desire to manage employees or inventory? No problem: in the information age, you can parlay your unique professional experience into a profitable niche business with a very modest investment. For example, let's say you were laid off from a corporate marketing job. Spend a few hundred dollars on a website and business cards and become a freelance marketing consultant. Take some business classes, carefully assess your target market, and be prepared to work hard. Self-employment could become the most rewarding and lucrative job you've ever had.

**Take your cue from Washington:** The Obama administration brings a new set of national priorities, from alternative energy research to infrastructure repair. A Democratic Congress makes it likely that many of these priorities will be funded in the coming years. This could mean boom times for several industries, from sustainable energy development to medical research and construction. And according to Hugo Sellert, research manager at the employment website Monster.com, “When the economy starts going down and unemployment goes up, the government has in place certain automatically triggered functions, such as unemployment benefits and other areas of public assistance that help people in tougher times. So in areas like social services, community non-profits and other service organizations, hiring might even pick up when the economy goes south.”

**Develop trade skills that are always in demand:** Some things are inevitable, no matter what the economy's doing. Cars will break down. Sinks will clog. Floorboards will rot. If you can excel at the practical skills needed to maintain people's homes and possessions, you're likely to enjoy a lifetime of employability. And during a recession, demand for these services tends to rise, since repairing a car or roof is cheaper than replacing them. Though a career in the skilled

trades may not sound terribly glamorous, the pay is higher than you might expect. The mean annual wage for carpenters is \$41,260, while plumbers average \$47,350 and electricians earn \$48,100 – on par with what teachers, interior designers and reporters make.

**Follow your bliss:** Nobody wants to be laid off, but losing an uninspiring job could be the spark you need to create a more satisfying career. If you find yourself facing unemployment, take the opportunity to figure out what you really want to do with the next phase of your life. Do you have a passion you've always wanted to pursue, but have never had the time (or courage) to try? If so, now is the perfect time to make it happen. Instead of applying for the same type of job you just lost, start looking for work you actually want to do. If you don't have the skills or credentials to get hired, consider going back to school or even starting your own business. Once you've aligned your professional goals with your interests, you may experience a surprising phenomenon. Since your job search is now focused on creating the career of your dreams, you'll approach it with real energy and enthusiasm. You'll make more contacts, do more networking, win more interviews, and impress more recruiters. And before long, you'll be back to work - and loving it.

**Choose an employer that will never go out of business:** With more than 1.8 million civilian employees, the federal government is America's largest employer. It also provides some of the most stable careers out there. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, government firings and lay-offs happen at just one-quarter the rate of the private sector. And with generous benefits, competitive wages and a vast variety of work available, the Fed is an attractive employer even in good economic times. Due to increasing retirements among an aging workforce, the demand for new employees is strong. And if you're not willing to move to Washington, don't worry - nine out of 10 government employees work outside of D.C.

**Master the skills of the future:** The Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts that information technology will be one of the fastest growing careers of the coming decade. But if you scan a few job postings, you'll see that even non-technical jobs now require computer proficiency. Companies increasingly depend on computerized scheduling, inventory and communications systems – and they need employees who can use them. So if you're still uncomfortable using the Internet or common programs like Microsoft Word, Powerpoint and Excel, take a class in basic computing skills. And if you enjoy technical work, consider getting a degree in information technology. Just two years of study will open the door to plenty of high-paying jobs, in everything from network support to software development.