

# How to Choose a Recession-Proof Career

Originally published in CareerFocus, Fall 2008

With economic turmoil dominating the headlines, students and job seekers everywhere are asking the same question: will the career I'm pursuing today still need me a year from now?

Though nobody can predict tomorrow's hot jobs with absolute certainty, author and futurist Daniel Pink believes you can make a pretty good guess. In his bestseller "A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the Future," Pink lays out a thought-provoking formula for determining which careers will grow, and which will fade away.

"Today you've got to look at what you're doing and ask yourself three key questions," he says. "Can someone overseas do it cheaper? Can a computer do it faster? And does what you offer satisfy the growing esthetic, emotional and even spiritual demands of this very abundant age?" According to Pink, the jobs that meet these needs tend not to be the "left brain" careers – logical, sequential, analytical work like assembling or accounting. Instead, the jobs of the future will be based on "right brain" skills like creativity, empathy and the ability to detect broad patterns rather than deliver specific answers.

Employment predictions from the Bureau of Labor Statistics suggest Pink may be onto something. Quintessential "right brain" jobs like health care workers, teachers, artists and salespeople are among those slated for the fastest growth in the next decade. And the list of jobs expected to decrease includes many that depend on "left brain" skills, like machine operators, packagers and stock clerks.

But that doesn't mean everyone should drop their left brain job to pursue right brain work. "I would never say, 'Design is important, so you should go become a designer,'" Pink says. "Because if you don't like design, you're going to be a crappy designer. Meanwhile, even though certain kinds of accounting functions can be reduced to a software program like TurboTax, someone who goes into accounting because they love it is going to be fine. You really need to figure out what you love to do, and what it is you're great at, and focus on that, rather than trying to overpredict what's going to be in demand. Ten years ago, most people didn't even know what a search engine optimizer was. Yet today that's a pretty decent job."

Though his theories imply that a number of common careers will gradually go extinct, Pink is optimistic about the future. "In 1965, President Johnson convened a commission of the very best labor economists of the time, and they looked ahead to the job market in the year 2000," he says. "They wrote this very alarming report, saying there's going to be massive unemployment because computers are going to be able to do everything. And that was flatly wrong, because it

didn't take into account our endless ability to create new industries and offer up new jobs. And I don't see any reason why that's going to fall away. So do I think there's going to be enough of these right brain jobs? Yes. Do I know exactly what they're going to be? No. But I'm mostly optimistic because I've looked at past history and it's always worked out. Especially in this country, the future has always been better than the past."

## SIDEBAR: Jobs of the Past/Jobs of the Future

### JOBS OF THE PAST

#### Manufacturing - Rhonda Meadows

The manufacturing industry has been hard hit by automation and outsourcing, and employment experts expect its decline to continue. That comes as no surprise to Rhonda Meadows, who was recently laid off from two different factory jobs. "Factory work is a dying art," she says. "This is a sad change, because it offered the ability for less educated people to find employment." The solution, according to Daniel Pink, is to get educated. "Community colleges are sort of a springboard for people who've been caught in the downdraft of the economy – they're the perfect place to learn something new and sharpen your skills."

#### Construction - Keith Randhahn

Though construction jobs are predicted to increase in the next decade, the economic downturn has weakened the current job market. For Keith Randhahn, this slowdown came at the worst possible time. "I lost my construction management job a few weeks before Christmas 2006," he says. "I was devastated!" But rather than switching careers, he refocused on an area of his industry that was still growing. "I was fortunate to find an opening in the alternative energy niche market," he says. "It appears that the 'green' movement has infiltrated the construction industry and those that want to succeed will heed the call."

#### Tech Support - Beth Lamie

Information Technology is a growing career, but not all IT positions offer job security. Experts list tech support as one of the jobs most likely to be outsourced - a fate that befell Beth Lamie last year. "We had been training people in India to do part of our work," she says. "I guess I wouldn't have been so thrilled about training them if I'd realized that my job would be the next to go." That's why Pink advises job-seekers to "find work that's hard to outsource, like jobs that require a physical presence."

### JOBS OF THE FUTURE

#### Nursing - Laura Silverthorn

If you're looking for a field with plenty of jobs, employment experts agree: get into nursing. As Daniel Pink puts it, "There's ferocious demand for nurses right now. Nurses can essentially write their own ticket." But according to Laura Silverthorn, RN, that demand has its downsides. "There can be a lot of mandatory overtime, few lunch breaks, and a ton of stress," she says. That's why she advises people to make sure they enjoy the work before committing to it. "Community colleges give you clinical experience the first semester, while in a four-year school you wait until the third year to even touch a patient. That's way too late to find out if patient care is right for you."

#### Financial Services - Nick McDevitt

With baby boomers preparing for retirement and globalization making investing more complex, demand for financial services is projected to grow. That's why Nick McDevitt used his Associate's degree in business administration to become a financial advisor. "It's really kind of a 24/7, all day type of job when you're starting out, because there's a huge learning curve," he says. "But if you put the time and effort into it, you could be making six figures within two or three years." The recent market instability hasn't made him question his choice of careers. "There are still millions of people who are retiring, and they all still need help. Personally, I think this is the best time to get in, because the scaredy cats are getting out!"

#### Hospitality - Jesse Schlachtman

With the service industries growing, food service workers are in high demand. But the hospitality field involves a lot more than waiting tables or flipping burgers. Just one week after graduating from Florida International University School of Hospitality, Jesse Schlachtman was hired as a procurement manager in an international restaurant management company. "I spend most of my day analyzing data, meeting with other professionals and touring facilities," he says. "And my degree will allow me to work in a number of fields that have need for foodservice workers, like healthcare, government, or even prisons. It's good to know that no matter what turns the economy may take, we will always need someone to run things."

#### SIDEBAR: Best and Worst Careers, by the numbers

##### BEST

##### *Education and health services*

The population is aging, life expectancies are growing, and student enrollment is increasing at all levels of education. So it's no surprise that education and health services are projected to grow more than any other industry. Between 2006 and 2016, they're projected to add nearly 5.5 million new jobs. Healthcare and social services will account for 4 million of these jobs, with

public and private educational services adding another 1.4 million. Registered nurses, home health aides and postsecondary teachers will be among the occupations with the largest growth.

### *Professional and business services*

Technology is transforming business, leading to increasing complexity and a growing need for expert assistance. That's why professional and business services are projected to grow by 23.3% and add 4.1 million new jobs by 2016. This industry group includes fast-growing jobs in administrative support, employment services, computer systems design, consulting services and waste management.

### *Leisure and hospitality*

The population is growing, dual-income families are increasing, and food and entertainment options are springing up everywhere. These trends drive projections of 14.3% growth in leisure and hospitality, which translates to around 2 million new jobs by 2016. Jobs will be especially plentiful in the amusement, gambling, recreation, accommodation and food services sectors.

### WORST

### *Manufacturing*

Productivity gains, job automation, and international competition have dealt a crushing blow to American manufacturing. Overall employment in this industry is projected to decline by 10.6%, or 1.5 million jobs, by 2016. Machinery, apparel, household appliance, and computer and electronics manufacturing will be hit especially hard. But there is a small bright side: employment in pharmaceutical and medicine manufacturing is expected to grow by 23.8% and add 69,000 new jobs by 2016.