

Top 10 Career Trends of the Decade

Workwise, the 21st century started out with a shudder

Today's job seekers face a workplace and job market that have changed dramatically in the past decade. Experts assess the changes: some good, some bad, some a little bit of each.

By Margaret Steen



“Students want to know what majors are in demand and what a typical entry salary would be. Security is uppermost in their minds.”

BAD:

Less satisfaction, more uncertainty

1 **The job market is more volatile**
The decade that started in 2000 began with one of the best job markets ever for job hunters, especially in fields like technology. It ended with the country in a deep recession. In between, the job market vacillated between being a buyer's market and a seller's market. “A lot of things have gotten more extreme,” said Joyce L. Gioia, strategic business futurist and president and CEO of The Herman Group. This “seesawing” trend in the job market is one of them.

2 **Job satisfaction has dropped**
In fact, according to the Conference Board, it's the lowest it's been since they started measuring it. The low marks are especially striking for workers under age 25, says John Gibbons, director of employee engagement research and services for the Conference Board.

3 **Workers have less job security**
“Companies move their workforces up and down much more fluidly,” said John Challenger, CEO of global outplacement firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas. “It leaves all of us more vulnerable to instant job loss, especially in times of recession.”

GOOD:

More freedom, more innovation

4 **Work is more flexible**
Non-traditional hours and working from home are very popular with workers, Gioia said. Some employers are still more flexible when it's difficult to find workers—but others have embraced workplace flexibility no matter what the job market is like.

5 **There's less stigma to losing a job**
The upside to the lack of job security is that workers who are laid off are less likely to have their peers—and future employers—assume they were doing a bad job. “I think we've entered into an era of no-fault job loss,” Challenger said. “People lose their jobs in downsizings even if they're performing OK.”

6 **Innovation is on the rise**
More companies are realizing that innovation is the key to their success, Gioia said. “Either they will innovate or they will be an also-ran,” she says. This means they are more open to new ideas from employees.

IT DEPENDS:

Fashion, free-agents and focus

7 **More work is temporary**
“We continue to see growth in short-term assignments and project work,” Challenger said. For workers who feel that they have been forced into temporary work, this is a negative trend. But some workers appreciate the flexibility, and it's increasingly possible to make a living doing project-based work in some fields.

8 **Dress codes are in flux**
The decade started out with much more casual dress in the workplace, then swung back to a more traditional tone. Today, “everything is kind of mixed up,” Challenger said. Workers have to take a cue from those around them: Some workplaces are more formal and others are casual. Gioia said both casual and formal workplace dress have gotten less extreme: “I'm not seeing people wearing tank tops and bare midriffs anymore, but at the same time I'm not seeing a return to suits and stockings and heels.”

9 **Technology lets workers do more**
Now that workers can check their e-mail from the beach and log into the corporate network from home, they are more productive. Companies are also expanding workers' jobs to include a wider range of tasks. “It's a very narrow line that businesses need to walk between the notion of job enrichment and job enlargement,” Gibbons said. Having expanded responsibilities can be a good thing—unless it feels like you're just being asked to do two jobs for the price of one.

10 **Career choosers focus on the practical**
As the cost of education has sky-rocketed, students have focused on the careers where they are most likely to find a job and earn a good salary, said Susan Walter, counselor and career services coordinator at Monterey Peninsula College in Monterey, Calif. “Students want to know what majors are in demand and what a typical entry salary would be. Security is uppermost in their minds.” This probably means more students will be able to pay back their student loans, but it also could mean some don't even try to get the job they really want. **CF**