

Job hopping: everything employers need to know

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Job hopping is on the rise. Or rather, it might be more accurate to say that job hopping continues to be on the rise. After all, the trend has been growing steadily for a few years now, and as millennials are joined by generation Z (a.k.a. the digital generation) in the workforce, job hopping is fast becoming the norm, not the exception.

With that, here's everything you need to know about job hopping: what it is, who is doing it, why it's gaining momentum, why employers fear it, and how you can benefit from it.

What it is

In general, job hopping refers to moving from job to job every 12 to 36 months. Dying are the days when a grad gets a job out of university and stays there until retirement – or layoffs. According to recent [analysis](#) from LinkedIn, the number of companies that the average grad works for in their first five years has almost doubled in the last 20 years – grads from 2006 to 2010 are averaging 2.85 jobs, compared to late '80s grads' average of 1.6 jobs.

And while employers might, once upon a time, have simply shunned any job candidate with too much employment experience (more on that later), it's now becoming a lot more tolerated (more on that later, too). According to a CareerBuilder [survey](#), 32 per cent of employers now expect their workers to job hop, and 55 per cent of employers have hired a job hopper.

Who is doing it

Like so many big transformations in the workforce, job hopping is almost entirely attributed to millennials. Granted, [some sources](#) have argued that previous generations hopped around just as much, but in a recent [poll](#), Gallup found that 21 per cent of millennials have changed jobs within the past year – a percentage that is three times higher than non-millennials. Gallup sums it up nicely:

“Millennials have a reputation for job-hopping. Unattached to organizations and institutions, people from this generation – born between 1980 and 1996 – are said to move freely from company to company, more so than any other generation.”

In addition, job hopping is more common in certain industries. LinkedIn's analytics shows that hoppers are most common in media and entertainment, professional services, and the government, education, and non-profit industries. Meanwhile, those in oil and energy, manufacturing and industrial, and the aero/auto/transport industry hop around the least.

Why it's gaining momentum

As for the question of why hopping is becoming so prevalent, Forbes offers a succinct [answer](#): “Millennials can earn a higher salary, grow their career, change locations more frequently, and find a better cultural fit from job-hopping.”

In essence, hoppers are staunch believers that they don't need to settle. They might be looking for a bigger paycheck, a better workplace culture, a stronger career path, more relevant perks, or a more desirable location – and they're comfortable moving from job to job as different opportunities become available.

Job hopping also helps eager workers to amass an ever-growing arsenal of skills. In PWC's [Millennials at work](#) study, the top benefit that millennials value from an employer is training and development – it beat out flex hours, cash bonuses, and even a bigger vacation allowance. According to the study: “Millennials expect to keep on learning as they enter the workplace and spend a high proportion of their time gaining new experiences and absorbing new information.”

Why employers fear it

The detractors of job hopping consider it, essentially, expensive employee turnover – and they're not necessarily wrong. Gallup [estimates](#) that millennial turnover in the US costs the economy \$30.5 billion every year. With an increased emphasis on employee investment – from [onboarding](#) to skills training – it can be frustrating for companies to know, statistically, that new hires will only last a year or two.

There's an additional problem for small to medium businesses, according to workforce expert Lisa Taylor, founder and president of Challenge Factory. While conducting research for her upcoming book, [Retain and Gain: Career Management for Small Business](#), Taylor found that 83 per cent of small and medium business owners are worried about engaging and retaining staff – especially when a single turnover can have a huge impact.

“Job hopping in small to medium-size businesses is problematic, especially if the hopper is a full-time member of the staff,” says Taylor. “If they are one of ten staff members, for example, and they leave, that's 10 per cent of your workforce. The impact of each individual person is felt that much more acutely than in a large business.”

How employers can benefit from it

There are benefits from this faction of the workforce that, according to some employers, outweigh the lack of longevity. In an [article](#) on the value of job hoppers, talent management consultant John Sullivan offers up several reasons why job hoppers can benefit a company.

For starters, they are likely to be top performers, and because some employers find hopping undesirable, they are easier to recruit. They also bring knowledge of your competitors. “When you hire a job jumper, you get the accumulated knowledge, best practices, benchmark information, their many contacts, and their experience from a number of firms,” says Sullivan.

According to Sullivan, job hoppers also are adaptable and need less training – they can learn contacts, new information, and skills quickly. They also produce positive business results. As Sullivan puts it, “do you want LeBron for a year, or Homer Simpson for 4.6?”

He also argues that serial innovators are few and far between, so getting one great innovation from a hopper is a good bargain. Finally, they know when to leave a sinking ship. “Smart people are loyal to a point, but if the job jumper left a struggling or failing firm before it crashed, you should give them credit, not blame,” he says.

Lisa Taylor suggests another approach to making job hoppers work for your company: embrace the gig economy.

“The balancing act is the ability of small businesses to understand the dynamic of what's taking place in the marketplace right now. And to understand how to leverage contract workers in a way that's respectful to the value that the contract workers bring. So, if there are ways for small businesses to be able to create ongoing relationships where they can feed work to people in and out of the organization, but always keep them within their employee ecosystem, that leads to much more stability. The worker gains a reliable portfolio of work and employers gain access to consistent talent. The alternative is the old model of hiring someone, losing them after 12 months and having to completely replace that person all over again.”

No matter what the benefits, the message is clear: the workforce is changing, and employers looking to attract top talent need to adjust and adapt accordingly.

The reality is that the workforce is increasingly blended – a combination of full-time, part-time, and contract workers that are on a wide range of career plans – and working to accommodate that will afford employers all the benefits that these new generations of employees can bring.