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IT Careers Tips

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**Master the Art of Job-Hopping**

Employment relationships are increasingly short-term in the changing economy. Workers are coming together in short-term project teams to meet the immediate needs of erratic markets. The distinctions among permanent workers, temps, and consultants are dissolving.

If you are job-hopping every year or so, you are living this trend -- whether you are hopping voluntarily or because your employer decides that your services are no longer needed.

If you hop, do so gracefully. Here are some job-hopping issues to keep in mind:

1) Benefits

Learn about the benefits system in the organization you are leaving and in the organization to which you may move. Find out when your pension rights vest (if they are only weeks or even months from vesting, maybe you should wait). See if your pension funds are portable or can be cashed out without penalty. If not, you can probably leave your pension funds in the organization (even if you are no longer an employee) until they become portable or liquid without penalty.

See if you can keep the same health-care plan (unless you hate it) and

the same doctor (unless you hate him or her) when you change employers. If you anticipate a period of time between jobs, ask about COBRA, a federal law that allows you to remain covered by your former employer's insurance for eighteen months (but you have to pay). If you don't want to pay for COBRA, or if your COBRA rights expire before you have a new job, look into short-term emergency health-care coverage -- in many states, you can get two consecutive 180-day plans for only a few hundred dollars.

2) Training

No matter what you do, never hop until your initial period of intensive training is complete. Never waste an opportunity to acquire marketable skills.

3) Future Customers

Even if you leave the organization, try to leave on great terms with as many individuals as possible. Select some decision-makers -- maybe those you've cultivated during your time in the organization -- and try your best to make them understand your reasons for leaving. Offer to finish the projects you are working on, to stay until they find a replacement, and to train your replacement. Remember, the individuals with whom you build relationships are going to be future customers of your added value, mentors, or maybe even your friends.

4) Leaving Without Really Leaving

It's expensive to recruit and retain new employees -- it can take up to eighteen months before they add more value than they cost an organization. Your former employer has made a recruiting and training investment in you. Offer your continued services as a part-timer, flex-timer, telecommuter, periodic temp, or consultant. If you hop through enough jobs -- leaving without leaving -- you can build a pretty impressive client list. Before you know it, you'll have created your own consulting business.

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