
The 50 Best Jobs in America

Great pay and superior growth prospects.
Work that's meaningful. Those are some of the qualities that we looked for.
And the winners are...

by **DONNA ROSATO** with BETH BRAVERMAN AND ALEXIS JEFFRIES

In the midst of the worst job market in three decades, you might think the only thing people care about when it comes to their career is having a job and keeping it. But when MONEY and PayScale.com, a leading online provider of employee-compensation data, surveyed 35,000 people online about what makes a great job, they rated intellectual challenge, a passion for the work, and flexibility just as highly as security. Perhaps the financial crisis has made many of us realize that we're going to be on the job a few extra years, so we might as well be doing work we can enjoy.

Not that stability and growth don't matter, of course. We put the heaviest weight on those factors when we began crunching the numbers to come up with our list of the 50 best jobs. But to make the final cut, a job had to get high quality-of-life marks too. Whether you're thinking of switching careers, are job hunting, or want to nudge a child in the right professional direction, this list should give you plenty of fodder for discussion.

EMPLOYEE

NO. **1** JOB

Anne O'Neil

CHIEF SYSTEMS ENGINEER
N.Y.C. TRANSIT AUTHORITY
38, NEW YORK

WHY SHE LOVES HER JOB: "I feel like I have a positive impact on people's lives because I'm helping them get where they need to go." She also likes that her job involves applied science, not just theory: "It's exciting, hands-on work."

WHAT SHE DOES:

O'Neil helps integrate the workflow between her department's operating, maintenance, and design staff.

HOW SHE GOT IT:

A degree in electrical engineering led to work with power firms. She fell in love with transit after a stint on a tunnel project.

WHY SHE STANDS

OUT: Two of O'Neil's siblings are also engineers; O'Neil is one of five female senior managers in a department of 1,500.



NO. 1



Systems Engineer

MEDIAN SALARY		TOP PAY		10-YEAR GROWTH	
\$87,100		\$130,000		44.6%	
FLEXIBILITY	BENEFIT TO SOCIETY	SATISFACTION	STRESS		
A	C	A	C		

What they do: They're the "big think" managers on large, complex projects, from major transportation networks to military defense programs. They figure out the technical specifications required and coordinate the efforts of lower-level engineers working on specific aspects of the project.

Why it's great: Demand is soaring for systems engineers, as what was once a niche job in the aerospace and defense industries becomes commonplace among a diverse and expanding universe of employers, from medical device makers to corporations like Xerox and BMW. Pay can

easily hit six figures for top performers, and there's ample opportunity for advancement. But many systems engineers say they most enjoy the creative aspects of the job and seeing projects come to life. "The transit system I work on really makes a tangible difference to people," says Anne O'Neil, chief systems engineer for the New York City Transit Authority.

Drawbacks: Long hours are common; project deadlines can be fierce.

Pre-reqs: An undergrad engineering degree; some jobs might also require certification as a certified systems engineering professional (CSEP).

NO. 2



Physician Assistant

MEDIAN SALARY		TOP PAY		10-YEAR GROWTH	
\$90,900		\$124,000		27%	
FLEXIBILITY	BENEFIT TO SOCIETY	SATISFACTION	STRESS		
B	A	A	C		

What they do: Call it MD lite. Working under the supervision of a doctor, PAs do all tasks involved in routine medical care, such as diagnosing illnesses and assisting in surgery. In most states they can write prescriptions as well.

Why it's great: You get the satisfaction of treating patients minus insurance hassles, since PAs have far less administrative responsibility than the typical MD. "I'm part of a team yet have a lot of autonomy," says PA Robert Wooten (pictured at right). You don't have to take on the time or expense of med school (see pre-reqs) and the field is virtually recession-proof, owing to

an ongoing shortage of primary-care physicians. PAs are also far cheaper to employ than MDs, so demand is expected to steadily increase as medical facilities try to rein in costs, says Bill Leinweber, CEO of the American Academy of Physician Assistants. And since they don't need as much specialized training as doctors, PAs can switch from, say, geriatrics to emergency care with relative ease.

Drawbacks: It's a fairly new profession, so the number of annual job openings is still small.

Pre-reqs: A master's degree; 100 hours of training every two years; recertification every six

How We Picked the Best Jobs

260 Started with more than 7,000 jobs that the Bureau of Labor Statistics projects will grow 10% or more over the next decade and that require at least a BA. Screened out median pay below \$65,000 for experienced workers and fewer than 10,000 positions.

100 Eliminated jobs that did poorly during the recession (based on Conference Board data showing growth in online help-wanted ads in 2009) and grouped jobs with similar responsibilities and skills.

50 Used data from CNNMoney.com and PayScale.com survey in which more than 35,000 workers rated their jobs on quality-of-life factors such as flexibility, stress, and personal satisfaction. Ranked jobs on current employment, long-term growth, pay, and security (60%); projected openings (15%); and quality-of-life factors (25%).

10 Interviewed industry experts and people in each of the professions to further assess its cyclicality, prospects for mobility, and perks and benefits. Selected the top 10 jobs based on these findings.



NO. **2** JOB

EMPLOYEE

Robert Wooten

PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT

FORSYTH MEDICAL CENTER
58, WINSTON-SALEM, N.C.

WHY HE LOVES THE JOB: “You can do all sorts of things as a physician assistant—I’ve worked in family practice, public health, and now emergency medicine. I enjoy the interaction with people and helping them get better.”

NO. 3



College Professor

MEDIAN SALARY	TOP PAY	10-YEAR GROWTH	
\$70,400	\$115,000	22.9%	
FLEXIBILITY	BENEFIT TO SOCIETY	SATISFACTION	STRESS
A	A	A	B

What they do: Teach and grade papers, of course. But profs also spend about half their time doing research and writing articles and books about their field.

Why it's great: For starters, major scheduling freedom. “Besides teaching and office hours, I get to decide where, when, and how I get my work done,” says

Daniel Beckman, a biology professor at Missouri State University. And that doesn’t even take into account ample time off for holidays and a reduced workload in the summer.

Competition for tenure-track positions at four-year institutions is intense, but you’ll find lots of available positions at community colleges and professional programs, where you can enter the professoriate as an adjunct faculty member or non-tenure-track instructor without a doctorate degree. That’s particularly true during economic downturns, when laid-off workers often head back to school

for additional training. More valuable perks: reduced or free tuition for family members and free access to college gyms and libraries.

Drawbacks: Low starting pay and a big 50% salary gap between faculty at universities and community colleges. If the position is at a four-year university, you’ll probably have to relocate, and you’ll be under pressure to constantly publish new work to sustain career momentum.

How to get it: For a tenure-track position, you’ll need a Ph.D. But all colleges want at least a master’s degree and prefer plenty of teaching experience.



NO. **3** JOB

EMPLOYEE

Daniel Beckman

COLLEGE PROFESSOR

MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY
52, SPRINGFIELD, MO.

WHY HE LOVES THE JOB: "The best part is the freedom and flexibility. It's up to me what I do research on. I'm basically getting paid to do something I love. I don't know if I could take having to show up at a job from nine to five every day."

NO. 4



Nurse Practitioner

MEDIAN SALARY \$85,000	TOP PAY \$113,000	10-YEAR GROWTH 24%
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FLEXIBILITY B	BENEFIT TO SOCIETY A	SATISFACTION A	STRESS D
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What they do: In addition to performing routine caretaking tasks, nurse practitioners have the advanced medical training to diagnose and treat a wide range of ailments. They can also prescribe medication without consulting an MD.

Why it's great: Thanks to

the growth of retail health clinics and the shortage of primary-care doctors, opportunities abound for nurse practitioners in settings from hospitals and urgent-care centers to private practice. They can specialize in fields such as women's health or oncology. Experienced nurse practi-

tioners looking for a change of pace can shift to teaching or medical research. Nurse practitioners are also specifically trained in patient teaching; disease prevention is typically a large part of their practice. "Helping people see that small changes in their lifestyles can make a big difference to their health is very rewarding" says New York City nurse practitioner

Edwidge Thomas. **Drawbacks:** Constant insurance headaches. Education requirements are ratcheting up. **Pre-reqs:** Must first complete training to get license as a registered nurse; master's degree, plus certification. A doctor of nursing practice degree is increasingly in demand, which requires about three additional years of study.

STYLED BY VIVIAN OGIER

TOP 50 JOBS

Want work that is enjoyable, pays well, and will still be around 10 years from now? Maybe you can find the perfect new career among the jobs on this list.

		MEDIAN EXPERIENCED PAY	TOP PAY	10-YEAR GROWTH RATE	TOTAL CURRENT EMPLOYMENT	FLEXIBILITY	BENEFIT TO SOCIETY	PERSONAL SATISFACTION	STRESS
1	Systems Engineer	\$87,100	\$130,000	45%	88,000	A	C	A	C
2	Physician Assistant	\$90,900	\$124,000	27%	82,000	B	A	A	C
3	College Professor	\$70,400	\$115,000	23%	278,000	A	A	A	B
4	Nurse Practitioner	\$85,200	\$113,000	23%	23,000	B	A	A	D
5	IT Project Manager	\$98,700	\$140,000	16%	174,000	A	C	B	C
6	Certified Public Accountant	\$74,200	\$138,000	18%	189,000	B	C	B	C
7	Physical Therapist	\$74,300	\$98,100	27%	181,000	B	A	A	C
8	Computer Security Consultant	\$99,700	\$152,000	27%	13,000	B	B	A	C
9	Intelligence Analyst	\$82,500	\$115,000	15%	51,000	B	A	A	C
10	Sales Director	\$140,000	\$239,000	10%	97,000	A	B	B	C
11	Anesthesiologist	\$292,000	\$408,000	14%	23,000	B	A	A	D
12	Software Developer	\$79,400	\$116,000	28%	796,000	A	C	B	B
13	Pharmacist	\$109,000	\$134,000	22%	198,000	B	A	B	C
14	Occupational Therapist	\$69,700	\$100,000	23%	107,000	B	A	A	C
15	Nurse Anesthetist	\$157,000	\$214,000	23%	19,000	B	A	A	D
16	Software Product Manager	\$106,000	\$148,000	28%	37,000	A	C	A	C
17	IT Business Analyst	\$82,600	\$119,000	29%	125,000	B	C	B	C
18	Attorney	\$115,000	\$262,000	11%	541,100	B	B	B	C
19	Physician/General Practice	\$150,000	\$228,000	14%	90,000	B	A	A	D
20	Human Resources Manager	\$71,800	\$111,000	13%	226,000	B	B	A	C
21	Financial Analyst	\$79,900	\$109,000	34%	127,000	B	C	B	C
22	Physician/Ob-Gyn	\$222,000	\$338,000	14%	14,000	B	A	A	C
23	Clinical Psychologist	\$81,100	\$172,000	16%	57,000	B	A	A	C
24	Psychiatrist	\$177,000	\$279,000	14%	20,000	B	A	A	D
25	Veterinarian	\$83,900	\$157,000	35%	68,000	B	A	B	D
26	Marketing Manager	\$76,600	\$126,000	14%	138,000	B	C	B	C
27	Speech/Language Pathologist	\$70,900	\$116,000	11%	113,000	B	A	B	C
28	Technical Writer	\$67,400	\$99,600	20%	84,000	B	B	B	B
29	Finance Director	\$121,000	\$214,000	13%	59,000	B	B	B	C
30	Telecom Network Engineer	\$86,200	\$130,000	53%	21,000	B	B	B	B
31	Director of Communications	\$78,300	\$135,000	17%	26,000	A	B	A	C
32	Hotel General Manager	\$76,800	\$146,000	12%	121,000	A	B	B	C
33	Securities Trader	\$113,000	\$491,000	25%	17,000	B	C	B	C
34	Account Executive	\$81,400	\$157,000	10%	76,000	B	C	B	C
35	Education Training Consultant	\$77,800	\$157,000	22%	23,000	B	B	A	B
36	Corporate Paralegal	\$65,600	\$96,000	22%	40,000	A	C	B	B
37	Quality-Control Engineer	\$69,300	\$96,800	45%	27,000	B	B	A	C
38	Manufacturing Engineer	\$75,100	\$103,000	20%	149,000	B	B	B	C
39	Software Program Manager	\$110,000	\$152,000	28%	11,000	A	B	B	D
40	Applications Systems Analyst	\$71,500	\$95,900	29%	14,000	A	C	A	C
41	Senior Internal Auditor	\$75,500	\$106,000	18%	42,000	A	C	B	B
42	Commercial Property Manager	\$75,400	\$123,000	15%	35,000	A	C	A	C
43	Creative Director	\$86,900	\$157,000	26%	29,000	A	C	A	C
44	Pharmaceuticals Sales Rep	\$105,000	\$138,000	12%	61,000	A	B	B	C
45	Investment Banking Associate	\$106,000	\$221,000	34%	13,000	B	C	B	D
46	Training and Development Mgr.	\$86,900	\$120,000	16%	30,000	A	B	A	C
47	Product Marketing Manager	\$105,000	\$146,000	14%	38,000	A	B	B	D
48	Quality-Assurance Manager	\$79,500	\$122,000	16%	51,000	A	B	B	D
49	Financial Research Analyst	\$65,500	\$155,000	34%	18,000	A	C	B	C
50	Outside Sales Representative	\$66,900	\$125,000	12%	72,000	A	C	B	C

NOTES: All pay data from PayScale.com. Median pay is for an experienced worker (at least two to seven years in field). Top pay represents the 90th percentile. Job growth is estimated for 2006–16. Total current employment level is estimated number of people working in each specific job. SOURCES: PayScale.com, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Conference Board Help Wanted Online Data Series, and MONEY research

NO. 5



IT Project Manager

MEDIAN SALARY \$98,700	TOP PAY \$140,000	10-YEAR GROWTH 16.4%	
FLEXIBILITY A	BENEFIT TO SOCIETY C	SATISFACTION B	STRESS C

What they do: Keep big tech projects like software upgrades running on time—and on budget. “We bring order to chaos,” says April Ellison, an IT project manager in the San Francisco Bay Area. **Why it's great:** Lots of opportunity. “Just about all companies need tech-savvy people who are great managers,” says Houston tech recruiter Linda Ranostaj. Figuring out how to implement cutting-edge technologies keeps the job challenging. Good upward mobility: IT project managers can rise to chief

technology officer of a company, where the salaries can hit \$300,000. Do you prefer to work for yourself? The field offers plenty of consulting work. **Drawbacks:** Hours (and hours and hours) of meetings. Aggressive project timelines. Staff jobs can be outsourced to consultants. **Pre-reqs:** Five to seven years of technology and computer-related experience. A project management professional certification, along with an MBA, will enhance career prospects.

with the new regs. Add inevitable changes to personal income tax rules and you have a pretty recession-proof profession. “Unless Congress does away with taxes, we’ll always have work,” says CPA Lisa Featherngill of Winston-Salem, N.C. Some 33,000 independent CPAs also work for themselves,

typically as tax preparers. **Drawbacks:** Deadlines are nonnegotiable; if you’re in tax preparation, kiss your personal life goodbye between mid-February and April 15. **Pre-reqs:** A certification exam and, typically, 150 hours of business and accounting classes and work experience.

NO. 7



Physical Therapist

MEDIAN SALARY \$74,300	TOP PAY \$98,100	10-YEAR GROWTH 27%	
FLEXIBILITY B	BENEFIT TO SOCIETY A	SATISFACTION A	STRESS C

What they do: Restore strength, flexibility, and range of motion to people who have been sidelined by injury, illness, or disease. **Why it's great:** Unlike many

health-care professionals, physical therapists generally see great progress in their patients. “I don’t just treat the symptoms—I give people the tools to

NO. 6



Certified Public Accountant

MEDIAN SALARY \$74,200	TOP PAY \$138,000	10-YEAR GROWTH 18%	
FLEXIBILITY B	BENEFIT TO SOCIETY C	SATISFACTION B	STRESS C

What they do: Crunch the numbers, whether it’s for financial analysis or tax preparation. **Why it's great:** Businesses began stocking the payroll with CPAs after major accounting scandals earlier

this decade, and a host of new corporate accounting rules going into effect soon should ratchet up demand further. Government agencies are also hiring CPAs, to monitor how well companies are complying

The Job You’ll Love

Looking to reduce your stress, nab bigger pay, or find more meaningful work? These jobs ranked highest in PayScale’s survey of 35,000 workers for those qualities (the overall ranking is in parentheses).

Top 5 Highest-Paid

- 1 Anesthesiologist** (No. 11)
- 2 Obstetrician** (No. 22)
- 3 Psychiatrist** (No. 24)
- 4 Sales director** (No. 10)
- 5 Attorney** (No. 18)

Top 5 Least Stressful

- 1 Education training consultant** (No. 35)
- 2 Physical therapist** (No. 7)
- 3 College professor** (No. 3)
- 4 Software developer** (No. 12)
- 5 Technical writer** (No. 28)

Top 5 Beneficial to Society

- 1 Family physician** (No. 19)
- 2 Obstetrician** (No. 22)
- 3 Intelligence analyst** (No. 9)
- 4 Veterinarian** (No. 25)
- 5 Human resources manager** (No. 20)

get better," says Jennifer Gamboa, an orthopedic physical therapist in Arlington, Va. Plus, there's no overnight or shift work. Medical advances that allow a growing number of people with injuries and disabilities to survive are spurring demand, says Marc Goldstein, senior director of research at the American Physical Therapists Association. And hey, baby boomers' knees aren't getting

any younger: An aging population means more chronic conditions that need physical therapy treatment. **Drawbacks:** The impact of health reform on the profession is a wild card. Can be physically demanding. **Pre-reqs:** A master's degree, plus certification and state licensing. Many employers prefer a doctor of physical therapy degree.

NO. 9



Intelligence Analyst

MEDIAN SALARY	TOP PAY	10-YEAR GROWTH	
\$82,500	\$115,000	15%	
FLEXIBILITY	BENEFIT TO SOCIETY	SATISFACTION	STRESS
B	A	A	C

What they do: Gather and analyze data related to international policy and military strategy, most often for the government or defense contractors. **Why it's great:** Like adventure? Data might be collected from satellite images, wiretaps, Internet chatter, and military and spy reports. Given the country's continued vigilance about national

security, demand should remain high. "The best part is helping our country," says Nate Copeland, an intelligence analyst in Herndon, Va. **Drawbacks:** High stress; you often can't talk about your job outside of work. **Pre-reqs:** Security clearance, of course. Foreign languages and often military experience are a huge plus.

NO. 8



Computer/Network Security Consultant

MEDIAN SALARY	TOP PAY	10-YEAR GROWTH	
\$99,700	\$152,000	27%	
FLEXIBILITY	BENEFIT TO SOCIETY	SATISFACTION	STRESS
B	B	A	C

What they do: Protect computer systems and networks against hackers, spyware, and viruses. "I consider myself a cyber-crime fighter," says Gregory Evans, an independent computer security consultant in Atlanta. **Why it's great:** No company or government agency can afford to have a serious breach in the security of its computer system. New technologies and an unending supply of creative hackers around the world keep the field challenging. Consultants can often work from home. And top-level pros command big paychecks.

Drawbacks: Talk about stress. If a system is infiltrated by a virus or hacker, it could mean lights out for the security consultant's career. "This is a job you can't afford to ever fail in," says Evans. **Pre-reqs:** Mostly major geekdom, since the skills can be self-taught. Still, a computer science degree comes in handy. An information systems security professional certification (CISSP) is increasingly favored. Experience is key for better-paying positions: Most companies won't hire a consultant with less than five years of experience.

NO. 10



Sales Director

MEDIAN SALARY	TOP PAY	10-YEAR GROWTH	
\$140,000	\$240,000	10.2%	
FLEXIBILITY	BENEFIT TO SOCIETY	SATISFACTION	STRESS
A	B	B	C

What they do: Set and meet sales goals, generate new accounts, and mentor and train new recruits. **Why it's great:** A successful sales director—especially one who can weather an economic downturn—will always be sought after. "I feel secure since I'm bringing money into the company," says Holly Anderson, a sales director in St. Helena, Calif. Sales

directors often move into high-level management. **Drawbacks:** Sales down? You're vulnerable to getting the ax. Commission-based pay can fluctuate dramatically. Expect to be on the road about 50% of the time. **Pre-reqs:** 10 years of sales experience and a year or two in management. A proven track record beats an advanced degree. ■