

September 6, 2007

LIFE'S WORK

## What Do Young Jobseekers Want? (Something Other Than the Job)

By LISA BELKIN

EARLY this summer, Joshua J. Pelton decided that he was meant to live in Orlando, Fla. So he quit his sales job in Detroit, packed his car with all the belongings that fit, put the rest in storage, and drove southeast daydreaming about sundrenched winters and packed nightclubs.

"I didn't have much of a plan, but I knew I wanted to be here," said Mr. Pelton, 24, who, in his emphasis on where he lives rather than what he does there, is typical of his generation.

Time was when applying for a first job meant papering the country with résumés and migrating wherever the best offer might lead. But this latest generation of graduates has already shown itself to be a peripatetic bunch — traveling more widely and moving farther from home for college.

Add to that the emphasis that Gen Y puts on quality of life — perhaps more than any group that has come before — and it would follow that Gen Y looks for work differently, too.

"To our generation, it doesn't make sense to have a great job in a crummy city," said Mark Van Dyke, 25, describing his decision to move three years ago from the suburbs of Chicago to Bellingham, Wash., where he worked low-paying retail jobs before finding one in marketing, at Logos Bible Software. It was all worth it, he said, because his new hometown is "on the Pacific Ocean but driving distance from snowboarding on Mount Baker."

Sixty-five percent of 1,000 respondents aged 24 to 35 who were asked by the Segmentation Company, a division of the marketing consultant Yankelovich, said they preferred to "look for a job in the place that I would like to live," rather than "look for the best job I can find, the place where it is located is secondary."

They also told researchers that places must be safe, clean and green. The most-cited quality was tidiness and attractiveness (78 percent) followed by "will allow me to lead the life I want to lead" (77 percent).

Urban leaders are increasingly courting young workers, because as baby boomers retire, Gen Y will have to fill the gap. Across the country, cities are scrambling to become the place that recent grads want to be.

In the last decade only 14 urban areas nationwide saw more of these workers move in than move out: Las Vegas; Austin, Tex.; Phoenix; Atlanta; Raleigh-Durham, N.C.; Charlotte, N.C.; Salt Lake City; Portland, Ore.; Denver; Orlando; Nashville; Dallas-Fort Worth; Miami-Fort Lauderdale; and Greensboro-Winston Salem, N.C.

How to join that list? "That's the question all our members are asking," said Carol Coletta, the president and chief executive of CEOs for Cities, a Chicago-based association of urban leaders.

Her group financed the Yankelovich study, titled “Attracting College-Educated Young Adults to Cities.” Its advice? Spread the word that you are, in the words of the report, “clean, safe and green.” Those qualities won’t seal the deal, but without them, this age group won’t even look.

This philosophy is leading cities to market themselves aggressively to young workers. Orlando, for instance, paid for its own investigation to find out what they want. The results convinced the city council to authorize \$1.1 billion in July to build an arts center, an event center and to upgrade a sports arena.

Boston’s mayor set up a task force to poll young adults about their needs, and intends to have their answers inform his development plan.

Memphis and Philadelphia, in turn, have created programs (called Mpack in Memphis and Innovation Philadelphia) that woo college students and young professionals, in the hope that they will feel socially welcome and politically connected, and stay.

Those who set their sights on a particular city, however, are not always looking for something that can be built or marketed. Many choose on a gut feeling.

Joy Portella had a “life epiphany” about two years ago, at 33, and decided to leave Manhattan, even though it is the center of her profession: international development. If she were deciding on just a “career move,” she said, she would have stayed in New York or moved to Washington, D.C. Instead she chose a counterintuitive path and headed for Seattle.

Her move was “liberating,” she said. “Before, all my moves had been initiated by things I had to do — jobs or academic programs.” She decamped to Seattle out of desire alone, and now has a job she loves as the director of communications for Mercy Corps.

Ms. Portella knew little of Seattle when she decided to make her move. But she did have a job offer, having spent a year searching from 3,000 miles away.

That is not true of everyone. Mr. Pelton arrived in Orlando with no job prospects. He had sent out résumés while still in Detroit, but received no response. “I found that it’s much easier to find a job when you are in that city,” he said. He now works in group sales for the [Walt Disney World](#) Resort, and said the city fulfilled his hope that he could reinvent himself there.

“I can do my regular job, then I can go be a pirate at Magic Kingdom, or watch fireworks every night of the week if I want,” he said. “Growing up in Michigan and staying there, I had an image. I was the good quiet kid who did well in school and was always responsible. Here, I like to be a little wild on the weekends and go to the clubs.”

Casey Blalock, 24, is about to take the same leap any day now, moving from San Francisco to Seattle without a net. “I’m not looking to reinvent myself or find the meaning to life by moving,” she wrote in an e-mail message. “But I do think I’ll get to know myself better. I plan on finding a new job, volunteering, cooking, reading, hiking and enjoying a crumpet down at Pike Place Fish Market.”

If it doesn’t work out, she knows she can always set her sights elsewhere. Because an age group mobile enough to pick up and move once is just as likely to do so again.

Alan Caudill, now 31, moved from Pittsburgh to San Francisco five years ago, when the Internet start-up that employed him was floundering and he and his wife of two months realized they had never loved Pittsburgh.

“San Francisco culture was more us,” he said. “I haven’t been to an Applebee’s, eaten fast food or drank a Coors Light since we moved here (and I’m finally able to get a real burrito).”

While Mr. Caudill has found a job he enjoys, in software management at another start-up, he has also found that he enjoys the adventure of starting anew.

“We’re thinking of doing it again,” he said. “In the next few years we’re debating moving either elsewhere in the country — we love D.C., and Manhattan, and have family in Cleveland — or Europe or Latin America.”

*E-mail: [Belkin@nytimes.com](mailto:Belkin@nytimes.com)*

[Copyright 2007 The New York Times Company](#)

[Privacy Policy](#) | [Search](#) | [Corrections](#) | [RSS](#) | [First Look](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Site Map](#)

---