

The Real Truth About Job Tenure

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A generation or two ago it was not at all uncommon for employees, and even the generations that followed them to commit their careers to one employer, or even one particular job at the same employer. There is no doubt that job tenure is a hiring criteria often considered by employers. While long-tenured employees demonstrate loyalty, which is a desirable trait to most employers and bosses, is it always good for a job seeker? The fact is lengthy job tenure can in some cases prove to be detrimental.

Average tenure of employees is dropping and has hit record lows in recent years. Corporations that once were loyal to their workforce have now given way to the bottom line and the new standards for driving shareholder value. Once employers began to demonstrate loyalty to profits first, the job seeker then realized their need to look after themselves. Cultures once known for providing long-term opportunities for loyal employees are now a thing of the past. Career employees are now “free-agents” who know they must be vigilant in their professional pursuits, because the employers are doing the same.

Only exacerbating the lack of employer loyalty brought on by shareholders is the advancement in technology, which has helped streamline and automate jobs once held by individuals. Many employees who once felt their jobs were secure found themselves unemployed and without a plan on how to market themselves. While this can be a frightening experience for many, it can also be a liberating one. Individuals now have more control of their careers than ever before.

What is driving decrease in job tenure?

Advancements in technology, pressure to achieve greater profitability, re-organizations, consolidation brought on by mergers and acquisitions, and savvy professionals who see employers as stepping stones in their pursuit of professional achievement are all key factors affecting job tenure. In addition, the United States has seen in the recent decades a boom in small business that has stemmed from advancements in information technology and the internet. Unfortunately, many small businesses have failed to stay competitive resulting in closure. Some have attempted to catch the wave of technology and failed to navigate the risk successfully. All of these are cause for decrease in job tenure.

Long Job Tenure

You might assume that having long tenure with an employer makes you a more attractive candidate. The truth is, sometimes too much of a good thing isn't always a good thing. What I mean is, employees who are unable to demonstrate career progression or improved scope and responsibility may find that their job tenure only highlights their inability to get promoted, thus leading to assumptions that they are deficient in important skills. I have found that employees with more than five years of tenure and no career progression are likely hindered by their perceived loyalty. Can it then be assumed that employees with great job tenure and career progression are more marketable? The answer is not always “yes”. In fact, too much tenure at a single employer can impair or limit one's perspective. To make sure you don't fall prey to this fact make sure you are constantly learning, growing, and being challenged. Stay on top of trends and don't be afraid to make a move if you feel your learning curve begin to flatten. I

Short Job Tenure

While in certain occasions too much tenure at a single employer can be detrimental, the most likely cause for job seeker woes is related to short tenure. As stated above, there are many reasons that affect tenure negatively. What we have learned is that an

occasional two year (or less) job on your resume won't be insurmountable, multiple will likely result in your resume being passed over. A good recruiter can help overcome this, at times. My advice is to make sure you are well informed and avoid hasty career decisions. The bulk of resumes we see with issues related to poor work history are the direct result of job seekers not conducting their due diligence. This is likely because they lack initiative (not a desirable trait for any employer), or they are in a bad situation and hope that a new job will rectify their current issues (not likely). Multiple layoffs, change in company ownership, or failed endeavors (ie. loss of funding or bankruptcy) are common reasons for perpetual employment issues. This is not a fool proof indicator of performance, though. However, it does create sufficient cause for concern and will likely land your resume into the wrong stack. Recruiters and internal employees working at the employer of interest can help overcome this issue, but you will still find yourself fighting an uphill battle through the interview process.

Bottom Line

To summarize, if you enjoy your job and are naturally loyal then I'd recommend that you stay on top of your career progression. As long as you are making progress and the scope of your responsibilities are leading to the achievement of your long term career goals then tenure will not be the likely reason for any future job search struggles. If you have good tenure but you are not feeling challenged then I would recommend that you engage a recruiter and inform your network that you are interested in new opportunities. Don't wait until you are frustrated, though, because that increases that odds of you making a career decision in haste, a risk not worth taking.

If your job tenure averages less than three years, then be prepared to answer the skeptics and endure a longer than average job search. Before accepting a new position make sure you do your homework, understand the company vision, analyze all of the risks, and be certain that the employer can offer you a position and career path that will help restore your average tenure.

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