

Focus on Other Geographic Areas to Get Your Job Search Going

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

Let me start with some recent figures, from 2008:

"The median [job search](#) among those winning positions in the third quarter lasted nearly 4.4 months," up from 3.6 months in the second quarter.

It's also notable that 13.4 percent of the job seekers ended up relocating to take new positions. That's up from a first-quarter figure of 8.9 percent, but still lower than the share who relocated in 2006 and most of 2007.

Moving is stressful and expensive, and some people may simply be unwilling to take that step. However, fewer people are relocating, no doubt, due to the state of the housing market. Job seekers eager to move for the right job may find themselves trapped by an inability to sell their homes and perhaps are even wishing they were renters right now.

One of the reasons it's taking so much longer for many to find employment is that many areas of the United States have been devastated by the economy, and there are fewer jobs available in those areas. The troubled automotive industry has had a serious effect on the Michigan economy, for example. Regardless of the economic status of the area where you live and work, you may be in a position in which you should consider relocating to find a job. If you are under economic pressure, relocating and [getting a job](#) may be a crucial priority for you right now.

Relocating isn't always an easy decision to make. However, relocating for a job is perfectly normal and is something you generally should not hesitate to do. This is especially true if you're living in an area of the country where your skills are no longer in demand. Notably, the history of the United States was built around people who relocated here because they felt there were better opportunities.



For most of us, our careers and the time we spend at work take up most of our waking hours. Considering this, you need to be focused on finding an area of the United States or the world where people are seeking and hiring workers with your given skills.

It is extremely important you live in an area where your skills are in demand. Life is in many ways like a game, and so is your career. If you were a fisherman, would you rather spend your career working in a small lake with a few fish or a large ocean with many fish? The more opportunities and the more competition there is for your skills in your market, the better off you will be. You need to put yourself where the action is if you want to survive.

Several years ago I was working at a [federal judicial clerkship job](#) in Michigan. In three months, the clerkship would be over and I needed to find a job. Although I already had a job lined up with a New York City law firm, I wanted to get a job in California. I sent a targeted mailing of résumés out to legal employers in California. I meant to send my résumés only to major cities, like Los Angeles and San Diego, but also ended up targeting several small towns by mistake. I received several calls from law firms in small towns, and they all had similar questions:

Why was I applying to a [law firm](#) in a small town?

Who did I know in the small town?

Was I also applying to law firms in larger cities?

One of the potential employers from a small-town firm called me and asked those questions because he was worried that, if I did not have a connection to the small town, I would simply leave if I did not like the job.

Employers want you to have a connection to the area if you are relocating, because they are concerned you will not have incentive to stick around. They get nervous if you are looking at employers in larger cities as well because they feel you are less interested in them.

The questions about why I was relocating did not come up as much in larger cities. Employers in cities like New York are generally of the opinion anyone would want to relocate there because New York is New York. People in smaller markets are a little less confident. As a general job search strategy, I would recommend you stress that you have a real interest in the company and believe it's a perfect place for you based on your personal interests, as well as your future career goals.

Generally, employers like to hear you have close family in a given geographic area. If you do not, you may have a significant other or friends there, or perhaps you went to college or grew up there. The point is you want to assure employers you have some sort of personal connection to the area. Absent family or friends, focus on the company and your sincere interest in it.

As an aside, I want to bring up an important piece of career advice about applying for a position outside of where you currently live. The employer receiving your résumé is going to wonder why you are applying there and not in your own geographic area. You never want to send the message you are unemployable or cannot [find a job](#) where you currently live. Employers want to hire people who are "winners" and are employable in all markets. Therefore, you should never approach

an employer by telling him or her that you cannot get a job where you live. Prospective employers should believe you are relocating because of reasons related to your personal long-term growth objectives—not because you have been defeated in trying to get a job in your existing market.

In a down market, many people end up stuck with large mortgages and unsold homes. They feel saddled with this and cannot relocate. If you are in a market that is getting worse and worse by the day, you may have to relocate before you sell your home. This is not something that you should be talking about with your potential employer, however.

An employer does not want to feel guilty you may be leaving an unsold home behind. Sharing this sort of information can also hurt you because the employer will suspect you have to return to your hometown to deal with the situation. Keep such personal matters to yourself in your job search. Never give them any possible reason to believe you are not their ideal candidate.

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