

Your Ultimate Goal: How You Can Find Job Security

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

One of the worst things that can happen to people is getting fired from a job with no notice whatsoever. It can be devastating to lose your source of income unexpectedly, especially in a contracting economy. Losing a job can color our perspective on the world and our future. Going forward, we have a difficult time allowing ourselves to ever feel secure again. We believe that things can change in an instant and that we might be suddenly out of a job again. This fear of sudden job loss is something that many people who have been terminated from jobs carry with them throughout their careers. The goal for all of us is to be in positions where we are secure, and to keep that security. Recently, I saw the movie *American Beauty* again. When I first saw the movie I was younger; I didn't really understand the importance of what was going on, and how it applies to everyone in the working world. In the movie, the protagonist is fired from his job. In response to this, he decides he wants to simplify his life and he takes a position in a fast food [restaurant](#)--which is far beneath the sort of job he had been fired from. He takes this job, the viewer is led to believe, because he wants to go back to a simpler, happier time in his life, and have again that feeling of empowerment and security from his youth. His goal is to find that stability in a world that had grown dark and uncertain around him.

Stability and certainty are so important to many of us that we often settle for far less than we could have simply because we want that security. We settle for worse jobs than we could get, we settle for less pay than we could earn. Simply stated, we settle because our cost benefit analysis of the world tells us security is more important than pay, job satisfaction, or status.

Several weeks ago, I wandered into an impossibly expensive bed store in Beverly Hills with my wife (where some beds cost as much as \$50,000) and when I asked why someone would spend so much on a bed the salesperson told me that we spend one third of our lives there. However, we spend far more than one third of our lives at work--or thinking about it. Furthermore, if we do not work, we cannot even afford a bed! Therefore, work is one of the most important aspects of our existence.

When you add up everything we do in our lives, whether it is participating in a church or synagogue, spending time with friends or family, or engaging in various hobbies--you will quickly discover that most of our time is spent working. Work may be the predominant activity in our lives, whether we want to admit it or not, and, more importantly, if we do not like our work, we are probably not enjoying life.

Have you ever spent time with people who hate their jobs? This is practically all they talk about. Not liking their jobs makes people depressed or angry. Being around people who hate their jobs is a miserable experience. I remember growing up in Detroit, where many of my friends' parents would come home at the end of the day from jobs they hated. They would walk straight to the liquor cabinet, pour a drink, and, after 20 minutes or so, begin complaining to their spouses about how much they hated work, or about some slight they received from their boss that day. Several hours later, a loud argument might even break out between the parents. This process would be repeated day after day. Even at the age of seven or eight, watching this process taught me that not liking one's job was a huge problem.

Sometimes it takes a child's mind to see what is really going on in the world. I remember writing reports about Russia when I was around seven or eight. The major conflict in the world that existed up until the 1990s was the threat of communist Russia against the United States. We were afraid of communism, but, in reality, communism is nothing more than an economic system wherein people are given jobs and told exactly what to do. They are paid less by the state but, in exchange, they receive security. In the United States, capitalism is built on a lack of security. You have your [choice of jobs](#), but it is up to you to find security within the capitalist system. Entire civilizations have been built on the quest for security.

In the United States, a giant strike was going on in late 2008 between the machinist union at Boeing and the company. The company was demanding the right to outsource certain work, and the workers were demanding security in their jobs. This fight cost the company \$100 million a day. At the same time, similar conflicts between unions and automobile companies were having far-reaching implications for the American [auto industry](#).

The fight for security is all around us.

When a man loses his job, you will usually find him in a bad mental state. Sometimes the man will stop shaving. He may look confused. He will fight with his wife more and snap at people around him. The stress of not having a job, or feeling a lack of purpose, can quickly bring on emotional problems. When people are having emotional problems, a psychologist or doctor may prescribe drugs or treatment, maybe wanting to talk about the person's parents, for example. Most often a better solution would be to look at how the person's job is going--or how their lack of a job is affecting them. Fix a person's career and most other things often quickly fall into place.

If security is so important, how does one go about finding it in a job? People get college educations, professional degrees, and do everything within their power to make themselves attractive to employers so they will have security. People rehearse interviewing so they can get a job. People attempt to go into industries or work in sectors with presumed security, whether they are in [government](#), [real estate](#), medicine, or law. Every industry out there has been presumed to be secure at one time or another. However, all of them involve some level of instability.

After studying the employment market for some time, I believe there are several ways to look for security. There is a push and pull between finding security and making a great deal of money. The question is, what do you want and how much are you willing to risk? Since I am a former attorney, I will draw from my experience to give you some career advice, and an indication of how the employment process works in the [legal industry](#).

When attorneys graduate from [law school](#), they typically try their hardest to get the [highest-paying jobs](#) they can. The highest-paying jobs are with large law firms and they typically pay around \$160,000 a year. Due to the massive amount of

money these attorneys make, they are expected to work extremely hard; they are also very quickly let go if they are not billing as expected or if there are issues with their work. These jobs typically do not have a lot of long-term security, and if young attorneys believe they may lose their jobs, they will usually try to find another job at another high-paying firm. They will likely keep doing this until they either become a partner at a high-paying firm, or they end up changing careers.

Once attorneys get a few years of experience at a high-paying law firm, they generally start wanting to leave the law firm to work for a corporation. Jobs with corporations are very much in demand. In most cases, corporate jobs pay at least 50 percent less than jobs at [law firms](#). The reason attorneys want to work for corporations, though, is due to the security factor. Security appeals to some attorneys far more than money (jobs with corporations typically also require less work).

Most (over 95 percent) attorneys do not end up with jobs in the highest-paying law firms. These attorneys typically do not change jobs as often, and in my experience, have a lot more long-term security. As an example, almost all of the attorneys I personally know who started practicing law with large firms that paid large salaries are no longer practicing law ten years later. The attorneys I know who went to small law firms or took positions with the government, on the other hand, are still practicing law. This phenomenon bears some examination, and I think there are reasons behind it.

I believe that the attorneys who went to large firms saw so many people lose their jobs (and may have lost their own jobs) that they simply became disillusioned with practicing law because they saw no security in it. Conversely, smaller firms, which typically pay less, do not let people go as aggressively; the attorneys working there experience far more security within the practice of law and therefore continue their [legal careers](#).

Generally, the higher paid or more competitive the job you take, the more insecurity that job will involve. Think about investment banks letting go of thousands of people. You will rarely find an [investment banker](#) in his mid-30s even who has been with the same firm his entire career.

I also want to note that the more complex the organization you are in is, the less security you will generally have in your job. For example, giant companies like Yahoo! might suddenly decide to let go of 10 percent of their staff to save money. A larger organization is, in many respects, more impersonal and, due to its complexity, there are forces involved that are simply beyond the control of the people working there.

A few months ago, I went to the dentist, and as I started speaking with the dentist and his staff of four, they told me that they had all been working together for over 20 years! I thought about how rare this is in today's society, where people move around so frequently between jobs. In considering this, however, I quickly realized the reason. A dental office is not a complex institution. If it is set up in the right area (an economically stable one) and the dentist is respectable (this dentist was also a professor of dentistry at USC), the operation should continue going indefinitely. In this case, the lack of complexity in the dentist's operation, and the presumed stability of the business, made it a secure work environment. Working in a small dental office is a secure job, it would seem, and in that sense, not much different from the job that the protagonist in *American Beauty* found working in a fast food restaurant.

There is one last point I want to make that is crucial and involves the people or person you will be working for. I am sure you have heard stories of the crazy boss in a given company who randomly lets people go, or who is altogether *unbalanced*. If you make your choice of employer based on one thing alone, make sure you are working for a stable person. You can detect a stable boss by many factors, such as the length of time certain employees have worked directly for him or her. Being around stable people is very important in your work environment, and so is feeling comfortable around the people you work with. You need to feel comfortable or you will have reason to doubt your security.

Security in a job is one of the more fundamental issues in all societies and is a basis for conflict between nations and people. Realize that you need to seek security and find it at all costs. This is the most important aspect of any job.

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