

SALARY SURVEY 2008

John McKee

Sit Tight or Jump Ship?

IT'S THE AGE-OLD CYCLE: When the economy heads down, job anxiety kicks up. So here's the question: Is the smart career play to wait it out or dust off your résumé and start looking elsewhere?

As a career and executive coach, I've been asked this question quite often lately. And with so many companies now

"right-sizing" and well-known organizations disappearing weekly from the marketplace, this isn't a time to simply sit back and manage your career on a wing and a prayer.

While there's no answer that's right for everyone in every situation, there's no doubt that your current compensation will play a big role in helping you make the decision about whether to stay where you are or look for greener pastures.

Tools like *Computerworld's* annual salary survey can help you consider your existing situation and job alternatives.

For example, if your organization is telling you that it simply has no budget for raises (again) this year, but you see that 73% of survey respondents received one, what does that tell you? Conversely, if you've just been given a

bonus that was larger than last year's, when 85% of survey respondents said their bonuses were the same or smaller, then your existing employer might seem a little better than it did mere minutes before.

The survey is also valuable if you're wondering about your current role. Job titles with the biggest gains in compensation are a clear sign of growth opportunities. If you're in an area that seems hard-pressed to get enough funding for the job to be done adequately and your pay isn't keeping pace with inflation, I'd say it's time to consider a career upgrade.

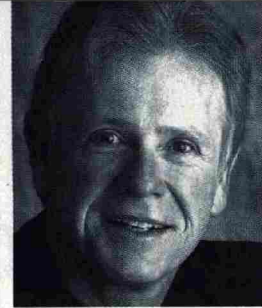
Many times, those types

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of changes can't be accomplished at your current employer. Quite simply, if the bosses regard you as suited to one particular role, it's often impossible to "re-engineer" yourself for consideration in other areas. If you want to get ahead, you might have to go to another company where you're not pigeonholed.

This survey also provokes thought about changing industries as well as job roles. Keep in mind that the average worker today will probably make at least five major career moves; younger workers will make as many as eight major career moves over their working lives. If they work for 40 years, that's only about five years per job. So it's likely that you aren't going to stay where you are for an extended period of time.

A few of the reasons for



such frequent changes are related to company life cycles — start-ups are appearing with ever-greater frequency, but established companies seem to be disappearing just as quickly. Other causes include the fact that more families have two working partners (increasing the potential for relocation) and the shift to a world economy, which affects entire industries.

I don't advocate anyone changing employers solely for money. While it never takes long to get accustomed to the new paycheck, it's the job itself that you face every day and that will either charge you up or grind you down. But more compensation with a more interesting job and a great employer is a match made in heaven — and these opportunities do exist, even in a down economy.

My advice is that you should dip your toe in the water at least once a year to see what's out there and how it compares with your existing job. Otherwise, you risk becoming stale, which will affect not just your job performance but your personal life, too. Because usually, if you're not having fun inside of work, you're not having fun outside of work either. ■

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