



Best Careers for a Changing Job Landscape

By [Marty Nemko](#)

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It has only been a year since *U.S. News* published *Best Careers 2007*, yet much has changed. As a result, in [Best Careers 2008](#), we've dropped five of the 25 profiled careers and added 11 new ones.

(J.D. King for USN&WR)

We've also added a new section on [Ahead-of-the-Curve Careers](#). These 12 careers are too nascent or narrow to justify inclusion as a Best Career, but they are currently viable and promise to grow further in demand and importance to society. If you'd enjoy being on the cutting edge, they're certainly worth a look.

The factors that prompted changes in the list of Best Careers have implications for all career seekers. Here is a glance at some trends and a word on how to search for *your* best career:

Even college grads might want to consider blue-collar careers. Last year, because *U.S. News* readers tend to be college educated, we included only careers that typically require at least a bachelor's degree. This year we've added four careers that don't. Why? More and more students are graduating from college at the same time that employers are offshoring more professional jobs. So, many holders of a bachelor's degree are having trouble finding jobs that require college-graduate skills. Meanwhile, society has been telling high school students that college is *the* way, so there's an accelerating shortage of skilled people in jobs that don't require college. (Why else do you think you have to pay \$100 an hour for a plumber?)

The four noncollege careers we added would be rewarding even to many college graduates, especially because college grads are likely to stand out against the competition. Those added careers are: [biomedical equipment technician](#), [firefighter](#), [hairstylist/cosmetologist](#),

[hairstylist/cosmetologist](#),
hairstylist/cosmetologist,

and [locksmith/security system technician](#). Other skilled blue-collar careers that scored well on our [selection criteria](#): machinist (manufacturers report a shortage), nuclear plant technician (few people are entering the field, yet plans are on the books for building more plants), and

electrician/electronics tech (above-average pay, and it's easier on the body than many other blue-collar careers). The takeaway: Many college graduates should consider skilled-trade careers.

Government is becoming an employer of choice. Corporations, fueled by pressures to compete globally, continue to get ever leaner. Nonprofits are increasingly strapped because of donor fatigue and continued scandals. Government, beneficiary of increased tax revenues in good times and often able to raise taxes in bad times, has the luxury of continually paying employees well, whether it's an economically sound practice or not. As the last bastion of job security, government offers good pay, ample sick days, holidays, vacation days, health insurance, and retirement benefits. With signs pointing to the Democrats taking control of the White House plus both houses of Congress, government hiring of nonmilitary personnel can be expected to increase. So, we have added [government manager](#) to the list of Best Careers.

Consider a career's resistance to offshoring. Well-publicized failures of offshoring may have led the public to think that companies are reducing its use. In fact, companies are quietly increasing offshoring efforts, even jobs previously considered to be better left in the United States: innovation and marketing research, for example. So, we have added offshore resistance to the criteria we used in selecting the Best Careers. Offshore resistance was one of the factors that led to adding these careers to this year's list: [curriculum/training specialist](#), [genetic counselor](#), [ghostwriter](#), [investment banker](#), [mediator](#), and [usability/user experience specialist](#).

Status may be the enemy of contentment. It seems the pursuit of status is greater than ever. People are flocking in greater numbers to such careers as medical research, medicine, and architecture. Yet recent surveys and other indicators of job satisfaction in those professions paint a less-than-rosy picture. So, we've added those three careers to our list of [Most Overrated Careers](#), which includes other high-status but often unrewarding careers such as attorney and chef.

A list of careers is a great place to start. We've tried to identify careers likely to be enjoyable to many people and to write short profiles that will give you a real feel for what each career is like. But these profiles, like any, should be only a starting place for your career search. If a career's profile appeals, read the recommended website or book.

If the career still turns you on, visit a few people in the career to get a balanced view. Ask questions like: "Would you walk me through your career from the moment you chose it up to today? What's good and bad about the career that might not appear in print? In the end, what ends up being key to being good at this career? Why do people leave this career?"

Next, browse textbooks used in training for this career. Would you be good at that stuff? Finally, volunteer to work alongside someone in this career for at least a week. If you're still excited, you've probably found a career in which you'll be happy and successful. Congratulations.

U.S. News Contributing Editor Marty Nemko is a veteran career coach and host of "Work With Marty Nemko" on KALW, 91.7 FM in San Francisco. He is the author of [Cool Careers for Dummies](#) (fully revised third edition).

Hairstylist/Cosmetologist: Executive Summary

By [Marty Nemko](#)

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In a recent British job satisfaction survey, hairstylist ranked No. 1. It's not surprising: It's one of the few careers in which you please nearly every client. (Save for the occasional one who cries, "What have you done to my hair!")

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People tend to be loyal to their haircutter, so if you're at all pleasant, you can develop plenty of long-term friends or at least acquaintances. After all, there's a lot of time to chat while shampooing, cutting, and torturing hair so it curls or straightens.

Other pluses: This career is a fashionista's dream: It's one of the rare fields with good job opportunities in which you're rewarded for staying current on fashion and design. And your job won't be offshored—it may make sense to do robotic surgery from India, but not haircuts.

Most men now get their hair cut by a stylist rather than by a barber, and more and more men seek out related services such as facials and manicures. So, not surprisingly, the number of male hairstylists and cosmetologists is growing.

Whatever your sex, to succeed you must be a great listener so you can unearth what the client really wants. You also need a good fashion and design sense so you can offer appropriate suggestions. Perhaps most important, you must be able to translate a great hair concept into a great haircut. In addition, you must be engaging enough that your clients remain loyal and willing to buy the hair and skin potions that represent an ever larger proportion of a hair salon's profits. With those skills, you can likely get hired by a high-end salon, day spa, resort, or possibly even a film or TV studio, all of which tend to pay better than does the average clip joint. Or you can open your own.

This career's downsides: Pay tends to be low until you've improved your skills and developed a clientele. You're on your feet all day and often into the evenings and weekends, because that's when most people want their hair cut. You have to work with chemicals that may be unpleasant. Finally, you must react well to dissatisfied clients: Fix the problem if you can, and if you can't, take a deep breath and let it go—we all make mistakes.

But few hairstylists find this career a mistake. Indeed, you'll have few bad hair days.

Smart Specialty

Wigs and hairpieces. You may find lucrative work building and styling wigs and hairpieces for people who have lost their hair, or even for stage, screen, and TV.

Median Pay

National: \$33,700. [More pay data by metropolitan area](#)

(Data provided by [PayScale.com](#))

Training

Usually, you have to graduate from a state-licensed barber or cosmetology school. Full-time programs generally last nine to 24 months. After that, you usually start as an apprentice, which means a lot of cleaning up in exchange for watching a senior stylist and then having the stylist watch you. Continuing education classes are offered, sometimes free, sponsored by a hair product manufacturer. Classes are typically about fashion, hair techniques, or product use.

Other Resources

[BehindTheChair.com](#)

[National Cosmetology Association](#)

[Careers in Cosmetology](#) by Mary Dennis

[Milady's Standard Cosmetology](#) by Milady

[Fun, Creative & Profitable Salon Marketing](#) by Allen D'Angelo