



Berkshire Economic Development Corporation  
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## The Invisible Job Market

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People struggle to find job and career opportunities in the Berkshires. We keep hearing about a high job vacancy rate, a low unemployment rate and all these available jobs, but finding them does not seem so easy. Why?

### **The Problem**

You have to swim upstream to find the crux of this problem. Believe it or not, the root cause is actually education and training. Follow me on this and stay with me to the solution. Only 32% of the population of Berkshire County has earned a post secondary degree or higher (this is lowest in the state by the way, most counties are over 40%). The most recent Job Vacancy Report shows that of the nearly 2200 current vacant jobs, 48% require a post secondary degree and advanced training. This means that much of the local talent base does not have the education level and/or training that many employers seek. Because of this disconnect, employers are going outside the area to recruit. They use national job boards, industry publications or recruiters (or a combination thereof) to find their new employees. Jobs with less education and training requirements tend to be advertised locally, while those requiring more education tend to not be. So when a resident looks at the area websites and classified ads, they see only a part of the picture and the most robust portion of the job market is then fairly “invisible”.

What compounds this problem even more is that, due to the invisibility of the higher end of the job market, most people assume there is no opportunity in the Berkshires. They tell their kids, family and friends there is nothing for them in the Berkshires resulting in our younger future talent force becoming discouraged and leaving the area. The cycle gets more vicious then and the gap widens. Employers are increasingly saying that they can't find local talent; local talent believes they can't find a job and the prophecy is then self-fulfilling.

### **The Solution(s)**

There are two levels on which to look for solutions; the societal and the individual. Closing the education and training gap is an issue that many in the Berkshires are taking on as a societal issue and there is tremendous work being done on this front (See *The More You Earn, The More You Earn* article). So let's look at solutions from the individual's perspective.

First, training and education is key. *The more you learn, the more you earn*, so upping your educational aspirations will pay big dividends. But equally important, you cannot assume your career is going to find you. Whether you are in the Berkshires, Boston, MA, Charlotte NC, or San Diego, CA, you are in a competitive environment and no one is going to serve up your perfect job or career on a silver platter. There may have been a time when points of job entry and career pathways were more obvious, but times have changed; what you thought was enough is simply not any longer. Be assured there is opportunity, your job and career are out there, but you have to be clever and hard working to make it happen.

Here are some ideas on how to make your job market more visible.

- 1) *Build your brand* - Have clarity about what your career aspirations are and develop the skills and capabilities to support them. Get the training, take the courses, and take on the assignments that will give you experience. If you have to, volunteer. Get known as someone who is good at what you do and gets results. Employers are looking for people who approach life with a sense of purpose.
- 2) *Network* - A wise man once said, "you do not want to depend on your employer for your paycheck; depend on your network." Get visible and build relationships. Go to Chamber of Commerce or United Way type events, serve on volunteer committees and get involved with your community. Not only will it make you more visible to potential employers, but makes opportunities far more visible to you.
- 3) *Go Mining* - Classified ads, web boards, and careers fairs are necessary parts of the puzzle, but are not sufficient. You have to go way above and beyond and start digging. Chances are there are multiple employers in the County for the type of work you want to do. Start to get to know those companies and keep yourself (and your resume) in front of them. Be creative and do not limit yourself. If you like marketing, don't just look at the local marketing agencies; remember that most companies need good marketing people. Conversely, don't be scared off by an industry. Just because you do not have any

financial services training or experience does not mean you can't go work in the industry. Banks, insurance agencies and even manufacturing companies all need good human resource, administrative, marketing and information technology staff.

4) *Be Persistent* - Rome wasn't built in a day. You may not be CEO right out of college or even get a return phone call after an interview, but tenacity is key. Employers like tenacity and your career will definitely benefit greatly from a pleasant, persistent approach.

Whether or not the job market in the Berkshires becomes more or less visible over time remains to be seen. However, rest assured there are far more opportunities for quality jobs and careers in the Berkshires than meets the eye. The trick is seeing through what may seem invisible to what is reality.

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***About BEDC:***

*The Berkshire Economic Development Corporation (BEDC) is the leading economic development agency for the Berkshires. BEDC is a single source of regional information for business relocation, expansion or start-up. The BEDC facilitates, coordinates and leads collaborative countywide economic development efforts to attract and retain high-quality employers and employees; it provides a single point of contact for data research, site selection, local tours, grant access, financing and funding options as well as tax and business incentives. The BEDC also provides a key connection point to local and state level officials. BEDC can be reached at 413 499 4000 or on the web at [www.BerkshireEDC.com](http://www.BerkshireEDC.com).*