

# Employment matchmakers: Pairing people and work

*Workers want jobs, and employers need workers.  
Employment matchmakers help bring  
the two groups together.*

by  
Elka  
Maria  
Torpey

**W**elcome to the 21st-century workforce: It's dynamic and productive—and constantly in flux. Data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) illustrate the employment mobility of our society. In January 2006, for example, workers reported having been with their current employer for a median of only 4 years. And about 10 million workers changed occupations between January 2005 and January 2006.

“There are differences in the way we work now,” says Annette Summers, executive director of the Association of Career Professionals International. “People used to join a company and stay there for their entire careers.” Today, she says, both workers and employers expect change.

But that expectation doesn't always mean change is easy. So, when switching jobs or finding new workers, many jobseekers and employers turn to professionals for help. And that creates opportunities for employment matchmakers.

*Elka Maria Torpey  
is a contributing  
editor to the OOO,  
(202) 691-5719.*





Some matchmakers, such as career and vocational rehabilitation counselors, provide jobseekers with career guidance or job-hunting advice. Others, such as recruiters and human resources managers, help employers find workers. Such divisions aren't always so clear, however, and some matchmakers assist both groups.

This article focuses primarily on employment matchmakers who interact directly with jobseekers, hiring managers, or both. It describes the occupations on both sides of an employment match, explains where employment matchmakers work, and reveals what skills are needed to succeed in these careers.

## Help wanted: Employment advice

Employment matchmakers who work with jobseekers give expert advice. Sometimes, their advice helps jobseekers find work. Other times, it helps people decide on a career. Whatever the focus, the goal remains the same: matching the jobseeker to a job.

Employment advisors, who often work as counselors, are experts in using and providing career and labor-market information. They might show people how to find job postings, teach them about networking and about writing resumes and cover letters, or coach them on preparing for an interview. Advisors also help people develop a plan of action for their job search.

When giving career advice, these workers match a client's interests and abilities to employment opportunities. To do this, they might talk with a client about previous work experience and education, likes and dislikes, and career goals. They also give assessment tests to reveal the client's strengths, preferences, and possible career options.

Finding an appropriate job fit involves explaining the work tasks and requirements of occupations and industries. In some cases, employment advisors recommend that clients get additional training. Advisors also suggest resources that can help clients learn more on

their own. And knowledge of the local labor market helps advisors steer their clients toward careers that have good prospects.

Employment advisors work with people who have a variety of backgrounds and experience levels. Frequently, their advice is tailored to a particular type of client, such as students, managers, or jobseekers with special challenges. Some advisors meet with their clients primarily one-on-one; others present information to small or large groups. They might also develop career materials, help run career centers, or organize workshops, seminars, and job fairs.

Advisors help jobseekers in many ways. But their work also depends on collaboration with their clients. “I see so much opportunity and so much potential for people, but it’s up to them,” says outplacement specialist Jayne Mattson of Westborough, Massachusetts. “My job is to try to instill in them some lifelong career management skills.”

Sarah Wilson, a career counselor at a community college in Charlotte, North Carolina, echoes that philosophy. “I really want my students to be ready to go out and get jobs,” she says. “I give them suggestions and ideas, but most importantly, I teach them how to find information themselves.”

The following discussion of job duties helps to highlight key distinctions between different types of employment advisors.

## Career counselors

By applying counseling and career development principles, career counselors lead their clients toward an employment match. These workers, like all counselors, help people make decisions and offer advice for dealing with problems. Career counselors usually work individually with clients. Counselors’ knowledge about people’s personalities and preferences, and how those fit into the world of work, gives them a foundation for linking people with professions.

Career counselors strive to help people improve their well-being through work. Some people, for example, might be unhappy in their current jobs. A career counselor assists

these clients in identifying what about their occupations or workplaces clashes with their personalities—and what might be a better fit. Other clients have limited work experience and need help deciding on a career to pursue.

To give people a better understanding of work options, career counselors often apply career development theories and tools. For example, many counselors use occupational codes to divide personality types and work environments into six categories: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional. After developing a personal profile of a client, a career counselor might suggest that he or she use the occupational categories to explore career possibilities.

**Preparation.** All employment advisors offer similar guidance, but career counselors can provide other kinds of advice, such as mental health counseling, when needed. As a result, career counselors usually need at least a master’s degree with a specialization in career counseling, community counseling, or one of several related fields.

A degree in counseling usually requires supervised experience, together with coursework. Many students complete internships and part-time jobs in career centers to gain hands-on understanding of the work and improve job prospects.

In some cases, career counselors must be licensed or certified. State licensure boards or prospective employers can provide more information on these requirements. Moreover, voluntary credentials offered by the National Career Development Association help counselors demonstrate proficiency in the field.

Some people work in other fields before developing an interest in career counseling. A recruiting or human resources background can be especially beneficial.

## Vocational rehabilitation counselors

Vocational rehabilitation counselors work with jobseekers who have disabilities. This collaboration often involves first identifying clients’ impairments and then helping them through any challenges they may face in finding a job.

---

Workers who give employment advice have expert knowledge of career and labor-market information.

---



These counselors understand how disabilities affect what people do for a living. Some vocational rehabilitation counselors specialize in working with a specific group of clients, such as those who have a traumatic brain injury or visual impairment.

Counselors who work for publicly funded facilities, such as State vocational rehabilitation agencies, must first determine whether the jobseeker requesting services is disabled. During this evaluation, vocational rehabilitation counselors study the jobseeker's medical or psychological records to confirm the existence and degree of his or her disability.

Vocational rehabilitation counselors help each client identify work that he or she might like to do and some ways to eliminate or reduce obstacles to employment. For example, they often teach clients about adaptive technologies and workplace accommodations required by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

If a disability prevents someone from doing the work that he or she has previously performed or if a client has a limited work history, vocational rehabilitation counselors might focus on training options or transferable skills.

These counselors might also work directly with employers or refer clients to job placement specialists, helping them to identify job opportunities and to place clients in jobs. When necessary, vocational rehabilitation counselors assist their clients in locating other resources, such as those providing medical care or housing. And they frequently maintain contact with clients during job training, placement, and other assistance to ensure that the arrangements are appropriate.

**Preparation.** Vocational rehabilitation counselors must meet specific educational requirements. These include either a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling or a bachelor's degree in a related field—such as social work, counseling, psychology, or special education—and additional coursework. Licensure may be required, and State licensure boards can offer more information on what is needed

to work in a particular setting.

Knowledge of disabilities and the ability to work with a variety of populations are important qualifications. Other skills, such as proficiency in sign language for working with people who are deaf or hard of hearing, might also be required.

Vocational rehabilitation counselors often gain work experience by completing internships. Counselors learn many of the occupation's practical skills by watching peers, and ongoing training helps these workers keep current on the latest laws, accommodations, and counseling techniques.

Professional certification is also available. The most commonly required certification, for rehabilitation counselors, is offered by the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification, although specialized credentials are available as well. Contact prospective employers to find out which kind of certification they require or prefer.

## Other employment advisors

Matching workers to employment options doesn't always require a degree in counseling. Employment advisors who provide career guidance have a variety of job titles and duties, including the following:

- **Career coaches** often have a broad range of clients and a broad focus. Although some career coaches help jobseekers exclusively, others provide guidance to both jobseekers and workers. These career coaches might help workers progress in a current job by teaching them a variety of life skills, such as time management or interpersonal communication. Career coaches are often self-employed.

- **Career development facilitators** usually do not have a bachelor's degree in counseling, but they do receive special training. Their job duties and skill levels range from providing career information services to assisting counselors. These workers may have different titles, including job placement specialist. Many of them are employed by

---

"My job is to try to instill...lifelong career management skills."

— Jayne Mattson,  
outplacement specialist

---

community or government agencies, such as One-Stop Career Centers or schools. Others work for staffing firms or employment placement firms.

- **Career management professionals** also provide employment advice, but they usually work with clients who have more experience or higher earnings. Their job duties are often similar to those of career counselors—and, like career development facilitators, their job titles vary. These workers are more likely than other career advisors to work for themselves or for employers.

- **Outplacement specialists** work with individuals who have been, or are about to be, laid off from their jobs. These specialists often help workers through their initial reaction to a job loss, and they help them to consider other employment options. Some work for out-

placement firms or employers; others work for nonprofits or public agencies.

**Preparation.** None of the preceding jobs requires a degree in counseling, but the education and training needed for these employment advisors varies. Most have some college education. Others, such as career management professionals, have a master's or higher degree in a field such as psychology or human resources management. Many also receive special training to administer career assessment tests.

Related experience is helpful for these workers, as it is for all employment advisors. Previous work at a staffing firm or as a recruiter, for example, could give them insight that helps them better serve their clients.

Voluntary credentials are available for career development facilitators through the



National Career Development Association. Other certification or training programs exist, but experts stress the importance of evaluating a program's focus and reputation before signing up.

## Help wanted: Finding workers

Matchmakers whose clients are employers concentrate on planning for and locating suitable workers. To succeed, these matchmakers must keep abreast of trends in employment and the labor market, and they know what skills are required in different occupations. Also, when filling specific job openings, they need to be aware of what their clients want.

Employer-sided matchmakers often meet with hiring managers to help determine the types of workers the managers need—or will need. Sometimes, to prepare for future needs, this planning occurs before employers have any job openings. But often, job searches must be done quickly, which adds to the challenge of making a good match.

“To get the right person takes time,” says human resources manager Tracy Staley of Bethesda, Maryland. But, she adds, a deliberate approach to finding workers doesn't always mesh with employers who are in a hurry. “It can be very fast paced and demanding, because a lot of times managers want someone right away.”

Instead of being a deterrent, however, such intensity is an attraction for many matchmakers. When George Fleming, a career coach in Phoenix, Arizona, worked as an executive recruiter, acting quickly from start to finish was one of the things that he liked best about his job. “The pace of putting the deal together, getting both parties to agree—it's exciting,” he says.

Another draw for these workers is seeing how influential their efforts are. “You really have a direct effect on the business, and you get to see that,” says Staley. “If you can't fill jobs, you see the negative impact. If you fill them with good people, you see the positive results. And you learn a great deal about the business.”





Recruiters, human resources managers, and employer liaisons are three occupations in which workers help employers with their planning and staff-search tasks. The specifics of what these workers do vary, but the pages that follow describe how they each have a special role in ensuring that employers' workforce needs are met.

## Recruiters

As matchmakers on the front lines of hiring, employment recruiters communicate directly with potential workers. One part of recruiters' jobs is to identify candidates for employment. To do this, they might search online job boards or resume banks, attend job fairs, network, or make "cold calls," telephoning people with whom they have had no prior contact. Recruiters then talk to candidates about available job openings and answer questions related to the positions. In these discussions, recruiters help promote the company and get candidates interested in applying for or accepting a job.

Another element of many recruiters' jobs is screening applicants. These recruiters stay involved in the selection process by reviewing resumes, conducting interviews, and recommending strong candidates to employers. Some recruiters verify character references or arrange for preemployment testing or background checks.

There are different types of recruiters. Often, these workers are classified on the basis of whom they work for or whom they recruit. For example, corporate or in-house recruiters work directly for the hiring employer; third-party recruiters work for the hiring firms that employers contract with to help fill positions.

Some third-party recruiters are further classified as either "contingency" or "retained" recruiters, terms that refer to the way their recruiting firms are paid. Contingency recruiters must work quickly, because multiple recruiting firms often compete to fill a particular position and the only firm paid is the one that finds the new candidate. Retained recruiters usually have more time and often interview candidates more extensively,

because their firms are paid regardless of whether someone is hired in the end.

Another way to classify recruiters is by the types of workers they recruit. Entry-level recruiters focus on bringing in inexperienced people, often by recruiting at colleges and universities. Technical recruiters, sometimes called search professionals, look for people with expertise in fields such as electrical engineering and computer science. And executive recruiters, also called headhunters or executive search consultants, specialize in finding leadership candidates who typically have considerable experience and earnings.

Still other workers—for example, employment interviewers, also known as staffing coordinators or workforce development specialists—do tasks that are similar to those done by recruiters. Like recruiters, these workers recommend job candidates to employers. However, unlike recruiters, employment interviewers do not usually seek out jobseekers. Rather, jobseekers come to them at an employment office, staffing firm, or some other type of employment assistance location.

**Preparation.** Many employers prefer to work with recruiters who have a bachelor's degree; some employers even require the recruiter to have one. Human resources management and business are especially helpful areas of study, although almost any type of degree helps recruiters to qualify. Some employers seek recruiters who have the same background or degree as the candidates they hope to hire. And recruiters often receive training regarding company-specific hiring criteria.

Experience in customer service, hospitality, sales, marketing, staffing, or human resources provides a good background for recruiters. Some start out as recruiting assistants, researchers, or sourcers, helping recruiters to review resumes, identify potential candidates, or do other basic tasks. Less experienced recruiters often begin by filling entry-level jobs. Recruiting for higher level workers usually requires more experience.

Several types of voluntary certification are available from the Society for Human Resources Management.

---

Recruiters and other employment matchmakers network, make cold calls, and communicate with clients by telephone.

---



## Human resources managers

Human resources managers specialize in a number of areas, many of which are not related to employment matchmaking. Those human resources managers involved in staffing, however, help with workforce planning and recruitment. Their specific job titles vary, but many of these workers are categorized as employment and placement managers.

In assisting with workforce planning, human resources managers might meet with hiring managers and others in a company to learn more about expected areas of personnel growth and attrition due to retirement, promotions, transfers, or other changes. Human resources managers also consider external factors, such as overall labor market conditions. Often using workforce planning software, managers analyze the information they have collected and create estimates of short- and long-term hiring needs.

To help employers develop a strong workforce, human resources managers might provide guidance about the types of workers employers should hire, perhaps by writing or revising job descriptions. Some human resources managers develop an employer's recruiting strategies, which may involve deciding which applicant sources to target or recommending new approaches after evaluating cost and employee retention.

Human resources managers keep up to date on hiring practices, employment trends, and labor and employment laws. They also keep abreast of human resources issues linked even indirectly to employment matchmaking; for example, human resources managers must understand compensation and benefits structures to ensure that they find and retain good workers in a competitive market. And some human resources managers oversee a staff of recruiters, reviewing their selections of final candidates.

**Preparation.** Human resources managers commonly have a bachelor's and, sometimes, a master's degree in business, human resources management, or a related field.

Related work experience is also usually required, and optional certification is avail-

able. These workers might have a background in recruiting or in other areas of management, human resources, or staffing. Like many managers in other fields, most human resources managers work their way up to their positions.

## Employer liaisons

Employer liaisons work for staffing firms or other organizations that offer human resources or job placement services. Liaisons work directly with an employer, either to promote the staffing firm's services to the employer or to ensure that its services are being offered to the employer's satisfaction. Some positions involve sales and marketing tasks; others require extensive account management. But all employer liaisons either develop or maintain employer contacts.

Job titles for these workers vary and include business services representative, business liaison, account representative, and employer relations coordinator.

Many employer liaisons help to forge new relationships between their organization and employers who have job openings or other human resources needs. They might market their organization's matchmaking services by being involved in local chambers of commerce or attending meetings and events for human resources professionals. Those who seek out new business typically do a lot of networking and other types of sourcing to identify employers who might be interested in using their services.

Employer liaisons also manage existing relationships with employers. They might, for example, educate employers about how or where to find job candidates and answer questions that employers might have about placement services.

Some of these workers are contact persons for managers who hire applicants. Others help managers when problems arise with the contract or temporary workers provided by a liaison's firm. Although most employer liaisons don't help to place individual job candidates, they often pass along information about the candidate to others in their organization.

**Preparation.** Educational requirements

---

"The best part for me is the fact that you're selling opportunities."

—Marie Artim,  
corporate recruiter

---

for employer liaisons vary, but most have at least a bachelor's degree.

Work experience helps employer liaisons understand a company's perspective. Particularly valuable is work in sales, marketing, customer service, recruiting, staffing, or human resources. Being well connected to the business community is also beneficial.

## Matchmaker profile

Employment matchmakers are usually outgoing. Many enjoy networking and are good listeners. And most matchmakers are able to successfully juggle several things at once. "You have to be really good at multitasking," says rehabilitation counselor Abby Swider of Wilmington, Delaware. "The most challenging part is managing everything and being organized."

The specific abilities required may differ by job, but having good people skills is a common denominator. "There's an intangible side to what we do," says career coach George Fleming. Employment matchmakers not only look at job descriptions, he says; they also consider whether someone's personality fits a particular occupation or position. Recruitment and staffing firm vice president Claudette Cunitz of Dearborn, Michigan, agrees: "You need to be able to read human behavior."

Most employment matchmakers cite the diversity of the people they come into contact with as one of the best parts of their jobs. "I'm always talking with and meeting different people," says business liaison Pat Richards of Sunnyvale, California. "That makes my job very interesting."

But working with people can also bring frustration, because success often depends



---

Nearly all types of organizations hire people to help them acquire workers.

---

on the motivation of others. “It can be really challenging when people aren’t willing or able to do what needs to be done,” says outplacement specialist Jayne Mattson.

Employment matchmakers enjoy helping others, and their work often has an impact on people’s lives. Mattson, for example, assists workers who have been laid off, and she says, “It’s so wonderful watching people find out that there is life after the company they left. At the most difficult time, you help.”

Career counselor Sarah Wilson expresses similar job satisfaction. “I enjoy feeling like I’m making a difference,” she says, “and that I’ve helped someone to get a job he might not otherwise have gotten, or to consider occupations that he might not have thought of.”

Even those who don’t work directly for jobseekers still help them every day. “The best part for me is the fact that you’re selling opportunities,” says corporate recruiter Marie Artim of St. Louis, Missouri. “You’re helping someone to start her career. She’ll always look to you as the person who did that for her.”

## Settings and salaries

The varying job duties and requirements of matchmakers often depend on where they work and can affect what they earn.

For example, matchmakers’ job duties might differ because of the size of the establishment in which they work. Larger organizations are more likely to employ human resources managers who specialize in matchmaking tasks; smaller organizations often hire human resources managers who have broader knowledge of employment-related issues. And in smaller organizations, it’s often common for workers to start out in entry-level positions and move up to higher level positions as they gain experience.

The type of establishment, as well as workers’ experience levels and job duties, can also affect matchmaker earnings—even within the same occupation. For example, the pay structures at certain types of recruiting firms might lead to income instability for some recruiters: Firms that are paid only for success-

fully placing job candidates might be more likely to link a recruiter’s pay with his or her ability to attract suitable workers.

### Where they work

Employment matchmakers work in a variety of places. Nearly all types of organizations—from hospitals to banks—hire people to help them acquire workers. Some also employ matchmakers to assist employees in managing their careers.

Employment services firms provide an additional source of jobs. These firms are categorized in different ways, and sometimes terms for them are used interchangeably. One distinct type is the professional employer organization, which recruits workers and does other human resources tasks. Many of the matchmaking jobs available at these firms are for human resources managers and others who often work for corporations. But employer liaisons work for employment services firms as well, helping to find and communicate with clients.

Another type of employment services firm is the temporary help or staffing firm. These firms usually provide employers with workers for a specific assignment that may be limited in scope or duration. A third type, the employment placement agency, helps employers find workers to fill permanent jobs.

Firms that offer placement or recruiting services vary considerably. Some specialize in finding particular types of workers, such as executives or healthcare workers. Others place or recruit a variety of workers.

Still other private employers of matchmakers include consulting and outplacement firms. And some people start their own career advising practice or matchmaking firm, often after having gained experience elsewhere.

Matchmakers also work in the public sector. One-Stop Career Centers and other government and nonprofit organizations hire a variety of matchmakers, including employment advisors and employer liaisons. Schools—in particular, 2- or 4-year colleges or universities—usually have career services departments that employ these workers.





### What they earn

BLS wage data for employment matchmakers reflect the overlap and ambiguity that result from variation in their job titles. BLS collects data for several occupations that include matchmaking workers, but sometimes those occupations also include other types of workers.

For example, vocational rehabilitation counselors fall under the larger group of rehabilitation counselors, some of whom focus primarily on vocational counseling, but many of whom provide other rehabilitation services. BLS data show that rehabilitation counselors had median annual salaries of \$29,200 in May 2006, with the highest earning 10 percent making more than \$53,170 and the lowest earning 10 percent making less than \$19,260.

All other human resources managers—the occupational title that includes managers involved with employment, recruitment, and placement tasks, but also other types of managers—had median annual salaries of \$88,510 in May 2006, according to BLS, with the highest earning 10 percent making more than \$145,600 and the lowest earning 10 percent making less than \$51,810.

Other occupations are more clearly and exclusively related to employment matchmakers. Many matchmakers are classified as employment, recruitment, and placement specialists, an occupation that includes recruiters along with some employment advisors, employment interviewers, and employer liaisons. According to BLS data, these workers collectively had median annual salaries of \$42,420

---

Match yourself to a matchmaking career by networking to learn about opportunities.

---

in May 2006; the highest earning 10 percent made more than \$81,680, and the lowest earning 10 percent made less than \$26,590.

Most of the occupations described in this article typically pay a regular salary. One exception is recruiters, whose pay is sometimes based on commission. For example, an executive recruiter might receive a percentage of the first-year salary of people he or she places in jobs.

But monetary compensation is only part of the reward for these workers. “You can make good money,” says outplacement specialist Jayne Mattson, “but when you can come to work and feel good about what you do and know you’re making a difference, the money is secondary.”

## Researching further

When considering these jobs, be your own first client by matching yourself to a matchmaking career. Do some career exploration before deciding which occupations to pursue. Talk to people who work in the jobs that interest you—and, if possible, visit worksites or employers. Informational interviews, internships, job shadowing, and volunteering are all good ways to get a feel for what the work is really like.

After you’ve decided on a career in employment matchmaking, network to learn about opportunities. If necessary, look into educational programs or consider joining a professional association. Also, explore job descriptions available both in print and online, and brush up on the essentials of jobseeking—including writing resumes and cover letters and preparing for employment interviews.

Throughout the jobseeking process, refer to the same career guidance materials that matchmakers use, including information from BLS and the U.S. Department of Labor. For example, the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* and *Career Guide to Industries* provide information about the job duties, working conditions, earnings, and more for hundreds of occupations and dozens of industries—including some of the ones mentioned in this

article. Both are available in most local libraries as well as online, the *Handbook* at [www.bls.gov/oco/home.htm](http://www.bls.gov/oco/home.htm) and the *Career Guide* at [www.bls.gov/oco/cg/home.htm](http://www.bls.gov/oco/cg/home.htm).

One-Stop Career Centers are also a source of jobseeking help—and, for aspiring matchmakers, a possible employment option. For more information or to find a location, visit [www.careeronestop.org](http://www.careeronestop.org) or call toll free, 1 (877) 348-0502 (TTY: 1 (877) 348-0501).

The following associations also provide information about matchmaking careers:

American Staffing Association  
277 S. Washington St., Suite 200  
Alexandria, VA 22314  
(703) 253-2020  
[www.americanstaffing.net](http://www.americanstaffing.net)

Association of Career Professionals International  
204 E St. NE.  
Washington, DC 20002  
(202) 547-6377  
[www.iacmp.org](http://www.iacmp.org)

Association of Executive Search Consultants  
12 E. 41st St., 17th Floor  
New York, NY 10017  
(212) 398-9556  
[www.aesc.org](http://www.aesc.org)

Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification  
300 N. Martingale Rd., Suite 460  
Schaumburg, IL 60173  
(847) 944-1325  
[www.crccertification.com](http://www.crccertification.com)

Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs  
1001 N. Fairfax St., Suite 510  
Alexandria, VA 22314  
(703) 535-5990  
[www.cacrep.org](http://www.cacrep.org)

National Association of Professional Employer Organizations  
901 N. Pitt St., Suite 150  
Alexandria, VA 22314  
(703) 836-0466  
[www.napeo.org](http://www.napeo.org)

National Career Development Association  
305 N. Beech Cir.  
Broken Arrow, OK 74012  
Toll free: 1 (866) FOR-NCDA (367-6232)  
(918) 663-7060  
[www.ncda.org](http://www.ncda.org)

Society for Human Resources  
Management  
1800 Duke St.  
Alexandria, VA 22314  
Toll free: 1 (800) 283-SHRM (7476)  
[www.shrm.org](http://www.shrm.org)

