

Wages have dropped, what is my work worth now?□

Written by Julie Desmond

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By Julie Desmond
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Job seeker Mary asks: Off the top of your head, is there a web site where one can see today's wages for positions? I know I won't make my previous income, but I'm not sure how much incomes have dropped. She also wonders: What do you think will happen with the employees that never were laid off, still making their great pay while the workers who were let go and came back are earning 20 percent less? Do you think those income gaps will eventually close?

I scoured my sources to find answers to Mary's concerns. I learned, first of all, that she is right. When she goes back to work, in the same job, she can expect to earn less money for her efforts. According to one employer survey, Applications Development Managers will earn 2.4 percent less than last year; the going rate for entry-level Administrative Assistants is projected to be 2.3 percent less.

Workers in education, transportation or agriculture will take a significant cut in wages this year. Those in health care, manufacturing or retail will stay about even. Those lucky enough to be working in a technical or professional role should find salaries are up over last year, although not by much.

The misconception is that those who did not lose their jobs are still making that "great pay." Across every industry, the road has been a bumpy one. Those who worked continuously through the recession experienced pay cuts or freezes, reduced hours, increased health care costs and elimination of benefits, along with increased workloads. This means the wage and benefit gap between those who continued working and those heading back to work not only closed up, it essentially caved in on itself, leaving everyone a little short this year.

As she begins to interview and plan her return to the working world, Mary can obtain current salary information from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Indeed.com or Salary.com as well as by calling professional groups, recruiters and employers and simply asking what an average wage for her target position would be. The Internet makes this research easy, and any neighborhood librarian can walk assist with the computer work if needed.

The first order of business has to be getting back to work, at any price. The next step will be to prove oneself indispensable, highly valuable and contributing to the bottom line success of the employer company. It could take two or more years to see prosperity again; meanwhile, develop your network, improve your skills and make yourself useful. Wages will catch up – eventually.

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