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# LLCC launches Professional Development Institute

Advance your career with programs to sharpen skills

**JOBS |** Kyla Kruse



Rep. Robyn Gabel has filed a motion to take a second vote on a bill that would give state regulators authority to review and approve homeowners' insurance rates in Illinois. PHOTO COURTESY LLCC

Lincoln Land Community College has launched its Professional Development Institute, featuring a wide range of training and continuing education opportunities designed to meet the evolving needs of employers and working professionals across central Illinois.

The Professional Development Institute serves as LLCC's central hub for workforce and professional learning – connecting employers, organizations and individuals to targeted training, credentials and customized solutions aligned with regional workforce needs.

"This is more than a new initiative – it's a commitment to our community," said LLCC president Charlotte Warren. "Strong communities are built on strong workforces. And in today's rapidly changing world, the need for lifelong learning and skill development has never been greater."

The institute offers both in-person workshops and online courses, and the programming reflects its ability to pivot quickly to provide timely solutions

in areas such as leadership and management; technology and computer skills; workplace safety certifications; entrepreneurship, nonprofit and small business; continuing education units for health care and K-12 education professionals; and workplace readiness and professional skills.

"The Professional Development Institute is a powerful reminder of what community colleges can offer," said Dr. Laurel Bretz, associate vice president, continuing, corporate and professional education. "People think of us as a place to get started – and while that's true, we're also a place to advance. Our programs are designed to help professionals sharpen their skills, elevate their careers and stay competitive."

In addition to open-enrollment workshops, the Professional Development Institute works directly with employers to design customized training solutions aligned to their specific goals, challenges and workforce realities. Programs can be delivered onsite, at

LLCC locations throughout the district or online, allowing organizations to upskill their teams without disrupting operations.

"We've listened closely to employers and built this institute to address the real challenges they face," said Dr. Diana Heeb Bivona, director of continuing education and business solutions. "Our approach is practical and employer-driven. We design training that solves real problems so employees return to work with tools they can apply immediately, not concepts that stay in a binder."

Upcoming sessions include Communicating Effectively, Building Stronger Teams Through Inclusive Practices, Supervision Essentials, Navigating Generational Differences in Today's Workplace and Understanding Customer Service Essentials.

To view course availability and register, visit [www.llcc.edu/PDI-schedule](http://www.llcc.edu/PDI-schedule).

# Researching and benchmarking a job offer

**JOB** | Jessica Walthall

Evaluating a job offer is one of the most important decisions a job seeker can make. To determine if an offer is competitive, you should consider three key factors: industry, market demand and location, plus your level of experience. By comparing these elements, you'll gain a clearer understanding of your true market value.

Enhance your research by using official labor market tools from government workforce agencies. The U.S. Department of Labor offers access to state and local workforce data through resources such as the Bureau of Labor Statistic's Economy at a Glance and other labor market indicators that track employment trends across industries.

## Determine the demand for your job

Market demand is one of the strongest indicators of whether a job offer aligns with industry standards. When employers struggle to fill certain roles, wages typically rise. Conversely, in oversaturated fields, salaries may stabilize.

To understand how your industry is trending, it's important to conduct salary benchmarking. This involves analyzing compensation data related to specific job titles and skill levels, helping job seekers grasp how demand influences pay ranges. The Human Capital Hub emphasizes that market salary research should start by examining how factors such as industry growth and job availability impact compensation expectations.

Review job postings across multiple platforms to determine how frequently your role appears. Then identify recurring skills or certifications that employers prioritize.

## Geography's role

Location continues to play a significant role in determining compensation. Factors such as the cost of living, regional talent shortages and local economic

conditions all impact salary ranges.

Mercer shares that labor costs vary by location, which is the fundamental reason for regional salary differences. Their guidance on geographic pay differentials highlights the importance for employers to adjust compensation based on the varying labor markets in

different regions. It's crucial to understand your geographic market to set realistic expectations and negotiate effectively.

Utilize tools like the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics, which offer wage data by state and metropolitan

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area.

Compare salary ranges across multiple cities, especially if the role is remote or allows for location flexibility.

Use cost-of-living calculators to gauge how far a salary will go in your specific area.

Define your professional value

Experience level is one of the most personal and often misunderstood aspects of salary benchmarking. Two candidates with the same job title may receive very different salary offers based on their years of experience, certifications and specialized skills. To effectively benchmark your experience, compare salary ranges for entry-level, mid-level and senior-level positions in your role. Determine where your certifications or technical skills place you, and review job postings to understand how employers define experience requirements.

### Benchmarking your job offer

After gathering data on demand, location and experience, you can compare your offer with the larger market. ADP emphasizes that compensation benchmarking removes uncertainty and ensures that pay aligns with market rates across various regions and industries.

Benchmarking process for salary evaluation:

Research the salary range for your role using at least three reputable sources.

Adjust the salary range based on the cost of living in your area and regional wage trends.

Assess your experience level to determine where you fit within the salary range.

Compare the employer's offer to your research, considering the total compensation package, including benefits, bonuses, and growth opportunities.

Prepare your negotiation points based on data rather than assumptions.

Benchmarking a job offer goes beyond just looking at numbers; it in-

volves understanding your value in the current job market. Considering factors such as demand, location, and your level of experience, you can gain a clearer understanding of what you deserve and how to advocate for it effectively. Whether you're evaluating your first job offer or contemplating a career change, taking the time to conduct thorough research will help you make informed

and confident decisions.

*Jessica Walthall is a content marketing specialist at Express Employment International, where she crafts impactful content to help individuals find meaningful work. When she isn't writing, she enjoys reading, watching football and spending time with family and friends.*

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## Lincoln Land Community College

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# When to step back from a leadership role

JOBS | Kelly Gust



## **Taking a step back: Does less responsibility lead to more fulfillment?**

For many seasoned leaders facing burnout, the idea of stepping back into an individual-contributor role can be tempting. The memory of simpler days, when success was measured by personal output rather than team performance, and evenings were free from after-hours emails, can be alluring. But is stepping down really the solution?

While few actually follow through on this impulse, a health care leader friend

of mine did. After more than two decades in leadership, including a director-level role overseeing 40 employees, she transitioned into a coordinator position with no direct reports.

The move, while ultimately beneficial, came with unexpected challenges.

**Why step back?** As a director in a large hospital, her days were consumed by meetings: compliance, budgeting, leadership and managing a large team. Her role left little time for the clinical

work she once loved as a pharmacist. Coupled with personal factors such as her own health issues, raising a child and her spouse's career changes, she began to reassess her priorities. With financial stability and family support in place, she decided to take the leap.

**The upside:** The benefits were immediate. With fewer meetings and no direct reports, she regained autonomy and reconnected with the work she found meaningful. Her reduced workload

allowed her to focus on process improvement and innovation, areas often neglected in high-pressure leadership roles. Most importantly, she experienced a significant improvement in work-life balance, with more time for family and personal well-being.

**The trade-offs:** However, the transition was not without its drawbacks. The expected reductions in salary, status and bonuses were manageable. More difficult were the unanticipated social and professional dynamics:

**Over-qualification:** Her deep experience made it easy to overstep boundaries, requiring careful navigation to avoid undermining colleagues or taking on too much.

**Isolation:** Peers were unsure how to relate to her; some treated her as a de facto leader, others with suspicion.

**Leadership tensions:** Her new manager, a recently promoted director, appeared threatened by her expertise, leading to micromanagement and strained communication.

**Professional perception:** Former peers questioned her decision, with some assuming she had been demoted. She was even excluded from leadership events, which was both surprising and disheartening.

**Key takeaways:** Stepping back can be a strategic move, but it's not a simple one. It requires:

- Clear boundaries to prevent role confusion.
- Emotional resilience to handle shifts in status and perception.
- Strong communication to build trust with new colleagues and supervisors.
- A supportive environment at home and at work.

Ultimately, this leader found greater fulfillment and balance, but not without effort. For others considering a similar move, it's essential to weigh both the tangible and intangible consequences.

**Conclusion:** Taking a step back in your career isn't necessarily a step down. For the right person, at the right time, it can be a leap forward in well-being and job satisfaction. But it's a decision that demands careful consideration, strategic planning and a willingness to navigate new challenges.

*Kelly Gust is the CEO of HR Full Circle, a Springfield-based consulting firm that provides talent management and human resources consulting to organizations of all sizes and stages.*

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# Myth vs. Fact: Misconceptions about the current job market

**JOBS** | Jessica Burns

No lies about it – finding a job in this market is challenging. With AI advancements, ghost jobs, skilled workers retiring, and new generations making their mark, the workforce is changing – and so are many companies' hiring practices. Even so, some principles still ring true when it comes to misconceptions about the job market. Break through these job market myths to empower your job search.

## **Myth: AI is taking all the jobs.**

The reality is AI is replacing some jobs, but it's also creating new roles. Job displacement due to AI isn't happening as quickly as was initially anticipated by some. But as is often the case with technological advancements and changing workforce demands, the best strategy for your career may be to embrace AI and the opportunities currently offered.

## **Myth: Skilled labor jobs are fading away.**

More workers are needed for essential jobs in skilled trades, light industrial and health care. As tenured workers retire, demand increases, and younger workers opt for traditional educa-

tion over skilled labor careers, shortages in these areas grow.

More than 3 million skilled trades jobs in the U.S. are estimated to remain unfilled through 2028.

The construction industry lacks 500,000 workers in the U.S.

The Health Workforce Analysis projects shortages of 108,960 full-time RNs by 2038 and a shortage of 63,720 full-time RNs by 2030.

## **Myth: No one is hiring.**

It takes longer now to find a job. People who have jobs are holding onto them in a wave of job hugging that's expected to last through 2027. Even so, there are companies still hiring. Connecting with a local staffing company can get you in touch with potential employers faster.

## **Myth: A college degree is the only way to get a good-paying job.**

Not anymore – now microcredentials, licenses and certifications are just as valid, and may even be preferred over a degree, depending on the industry.

## **Myth: Temporary work is a waste of time.**

Temporary or contract work is an opportunity to earn a paycheck, pick up new skills and add experience to your resume whether you're in between jobs or looking to enter a new industry. A temporary job can also turn into full-time work.

## **Myth: You should never apply for a job unless you qualify 100%.**

This doesn't account for soft skills, personality or cultural fit of the company and will limit your job opportunities. Meeting 70% of job posting requirements is sufficient, according to employers.

The workforce is constantly changing, and so are the rules of job hunting.

*Jessica Burns is a senior content marketing specialist at Express Employment International creating content for employers and leaders about the workplace of today. She is an accomplished former social media professional and award-winning writer.*



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# Results from the latest Job Seeker Report

**JOBS** | Express Employment International

To track the latest trends, The Harris Poll, on behalf of Express Employment Professionals, conducts a biannual Job Seeker Report survey tracking job market trends across a wide range of industries. The report also features training, development and skills-building opportunities developed by Express to support job seekers in their career journeys. Discover more current job market trends, including flexibility in a shifting market and job security anxiety, in the Job Seeker Report.

## Applying when you're overqualified

Job seekers recognize employers may be doing a disservice by dismissing these candidates outright, as 81% report organizations miss out by rejecting overqualified candidates too quickly. In fact, 65% of job seekers said they have applied for roles for which they are themselves overqualified for reasons such as:

- The need for income – 59%
- Better work-life balance – 56%
- A passion for the industry – 41%

Most job seekers (87%) agree it's appropriate to apply to jobs they're overqualified for if it's a position they want. From the hiring perspective, 70% of hiring managers say their company typically considers hiring candidates who are overqualified.

## Key barriers to finding a job

- Lacking skills, such as hard skills, soft skills, AI skills and communication skills (43%)
- Companies claiming to be hiring, but are only collecting applicants/resumes to review (35%)
- Being overqualified (30%)

## Job security

The most common offerings job seekers say would make them feel confident about their long-term job security at a company are:

- Training for employees taking on additional roles and responsibilities (41%)
- Clearer communications from senior leadership (41%)
- Access to cross-training or upskilling programs (38%)

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