

# At Work: Young Workers Quit Jobs to Plot New Paths --- With hiring on rise, some opt to take a breather

Varagur, Krithika . Wall Street Journal , Eastern edition; New York, N.Y. [New York, N.Y.]. 30 Aug 2021: A.11.

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## FULL TEXT

They launched careers in the years after the 2007-09 recession and only recently hit their stride in earning power. Now some young professionals are quitting their jobs with no Plan B.

With several years in the workforce and some savings in the bank, they are taking a breather to learn new skills, network and develop their creative potential before locking into another career path. These workers, now in their late 20s and early 30s, are both chastened by pandemic-era burnout and optimistic about a rebounding job market. While many of their peers are jumping immediately to better-paying or more well-suited jobs, they are leaning into an early career break instead.

Tessa Raden, 33, was so burned out by remote work that in July she quit what she had considered her dream job -- program director at the Dramatists Guild Foundation -- with no set backup plan. She goofed off for a couple of weeks, then picked up a bartending job, about five evening shifts a week, at Brookland's Finest Bar & Kitchen in her Washington, D.C., neighborhood.

"I was just so tired of pushing, and I had totally lost my passion," says Ms. Raden, who has a master's degree in arts management. On paper, her job overseeing programming and supporting writers was everything she had worked toward in her adult life. But the pandemic eliminated live performances, a part of her job she loved, and she found it hard to focus and stay motivated sitting at home on her computer.

"I love that I don't have to take my work home with me," she says of her new lifestyle. "And I love that the majority of my job now is just being friendly, not staring at a computer screen."

Ms. Raden is using her free hours to complete a graduate certificate in education policy and hopes eventually to transition into public education. She notes she probably wouldn't have been able to afford such a break in her less-flush 20s. But for now, she has enough savings to cover her rent, and bartending covers her other expenses. "I think I can hang on to this structure for a couple more months," she says. "I'm trying to plan a little less."

U.S. workers are quitting their jobs at some of the highest rates in years, a sign of great appetite for change and confidence in better prospects down the line. The share of people leaving jobs reached 2.7% in June, according to the Labor Department, just shy of April's 2.8% rate, the highest level since the government began tracking quit rates two decades ago.

A Prudential Financial survey of 2,000 American workers in the spring found that millennials -- those between the ages of 25 and 40 -- were antsy than other generations to make a change: More than a third of that demographic said they planned to look for a new job post-pandemic, compared with about a quarter of workers overall.

Some of these workers don't want to jump into another role until they find one more aligned with their long-term career goals.

"Earlier this year I was hoping to switch jobs and scrolling through tons of postings, but I eventually realized the only way I could make a successful career transition was to quit," says 33-year-old Andrew Hibschan, who was a program lead and assistant professor at La Salle University in Philadelphia until he quit this month. "I didn't have

the time or energy to devote myself to the search the way I wanted to," he says.

He started out mainly teaching English and, over the course of the decade, became more involved in admissions and other academic-support programs. But his longer-term goal is to work in education technology or learning development. To that end, he spends two to three hours a day taking online classes to brush up on topics such as diversity-and-inclusion programming, and at least another hour a day on networking and the job search.

"This is the first time since I was 14 that I don't have a job, which is somewhat terrifying," Mr. Hibschman says.

"But I do feel optimistic because there are so many jobs out there."

Getting married in May has eased the transition. In addition to lending emotional support, his husband also is working to get him onto his health-insurance plan.

Figuring out health insurance can be one of the thorniest issues for those leaving a full-time job with benefits.

Most options leave a lot to be desired, says Laura Briggs, a coach for freelance workers based in Springfield, Ill.

Many join a partner's plan if that's in the cards, she says, and another option is a high-deductible plan with relatively low premiums that covers worst-case scenarios like surgeries and accidents. Another short-term option is to use Cobra, a federal law that permits workers who leave their jobs to temporarily continue a former employer's health benefits, though that can be expensive.

Ms. Briggs also suggests that those planning to leave a job with benefits meet with a financial adviser. "You should be proactive about figuring out how much you can and should set aside every month, especially if you no longer have employer-matching contributions to your retirement plan," she says.

Evelyn Danciger, 27, says she is relying on several years of savings and looking into Cobra options as she makes a transition to full-time writing. She resigned in July from the Sid Lee creative agency, where she was a senior manager. She had dreamed of becoming a writer since she was in third grade, she says, but fell into marketing in 2016 after graduating from Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, where she majored in screenwriting. As she took on bigger projects at the firm, the time she usually set aside to write slowly disappeared. The heavier workload left her "stress-crying" and feeling intense burnout. "I wasn't doing anything creative, and my job had turned into mostly client management," she says.

Now that her days are free, she can write more, plus do more in-person networking in Los Angeles, where she lives.

"I'm so excited to call up my industry contacts and go out for lunch and coffee again," she says. "I don't have to cram it all into a weekend now."

Credit: By Krithika Varagur

## DETAILS

<b>Subject:</b>	Careers; Education; Employment; Pandemics; Consumer-driven health plans; COBRA 1985-US; Burnout; Professionals; Career changes; Labor market
<b>Business indexing term:</b>	Subject: Careers Employment Consumer-driven health plans COBRA 1985-US Burnout Professionals Career changes Labor market
<b>Location:</b>	Los Angeles California United States--US
<b>Publication title:</b>	Wall Street Journal, Eastern edition; New York, N.Y.
<b>First page:</b>	A.11
<b>Publication year:</b>	2021
<b>Publication date:</b>	Aug 30, 2021

<b>Section:</b>	PERSONAL JOURNAL
<b>Publisher:</b>	Dow Jones & Company Inc
<b>Place of publication:</b>	New York, N.Y.
<b>Country of publication:</b>	United States, New York, N.Y.
<b>Publication subject:</b>	Business And Economics--Banking And Finance
<b>ISSN:</b>	00999660
<b>Source type:</b>	Newspaper
<b>Language of publication:</b>	English
<b>Document type:</b>	News
<b>ProQuest document ID:</b>	2565967859
<b>Document URL:</b>	<a href="https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/at-work-young-workers-quit-jobs-plot-new-paths/docview/2565967859/se-2?accountid=44910">https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/at-work-young-workers-quit-jobs-plot-new-paths/docview/2565967859/se-2?accountid=44910</a>
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<b>Last updated:</b>	2021-08-30
<b>Database:</b>	U.S. Major Dailies

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