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# Tough economy spawns mid-career changes in tech

By Jim Schakenbach, Special to Mass High Tech

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As 2008 draws to a close, one thing is certain: We live in uncertain times. Signs are all around us, including the near collapse of Wall Street, shaky housing markets, and rising unemployment. And the outlook for 2009 is not much better.

In one segment of the tech space — information technology — a survey this summer by [Goldman Sachs](#) of CIOs from major companies nationwide indicated possible sharp reductions in both IT staff and contracted service providers. Most of these reductions would come from programming staffs and both on-site and off-site third-party service providers. The survey is perhaps indicative of the changes that are afoot in a number of technology sectors. If a mid-career job change is in your future, either by choice or by circumstance, what should you do?

First, don't panic, advise training consultants and area employers. They believe that a job change can represent a tremendous opportunity and a chance to reassess your career choice. But what about the gloomy forecast for many technology jobs?

"It's true that employment levels in true technology have been steady or declining in recent years," says [Deborah Boisvert](#), executive director of the [BATEC Center for IT](#) in Boston, a partnership of several Massachusetts colleges and universities focused on IT education and training. "However, the sector has gotten fuzzier as many IT jobs are now being identified in non-IT terms, such as 'financial analyst' or 'health-care professional.'"

Boisvert even sees some technology sectors offering more employment opportunities in the coming year. "Massachusetts recently passed a very large life sciences bill. How do we, both the state and employers, support that? It's going to require an enormous amount of IT processing in fields such as bioinformatics (and) computational biology, to name just two. Companies will be looking for employees who can offer interdisciplinary skills, such as bench-level research and programming or processing knowledge. There will be great opportunities for people to jump industries from, say, biology or pharmaceuticals to IT, and vice versa," she said.

According to Boisvert, professionals looking to leverage IT to create more value for themselves should consider complementing their existing skill set with new skills that will enable them to make IT more useful for their employer. "Look at yourself as an asset and a mechanism for that company to improve its processes. If you're a pure researcher, then think about gaining programming skills so that you can use your research abilities to create and manage new or improved processes for your employer," Boisvert said.

[Jeanne Picardi](#), marketing director for [The Training Associates Inc.](#), a Westborough-based IT training provider, agrees. "Companies are willing to hire new employees looking to make a career change, even one involving employment in a completely different field, if that person brings something of value to the party."

Picardi says companies are willing to pay for some training if the employee is skilled in an area deemed of value to the organization, especially if the individual already possesses the

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most critical skills required, including those the company does not have the resources or time to teach — and if the organization has the resources to train or develop the individual in those skills areas he or she doesn't have but needs.

Be sure to use all the outreach channels available to you, counsels **Barbara Massa**, senior director of talent acquisition for **EMC Corp.**, the Hopkinton-based IT giant with 40,500 employees worldwide and a wide range of information infrastructure products and services. "What might have worked in the past won't necessarily work now," said Massa. "Educate yourself if you're not familiar with all the new channels, such as professional and social networks including LinkedIn, FaceBook, MySpace, and others. Companies such as ours use these very same channels to seek out and engage new employees."

As a major employer, EMC sees mid-career change professionals as a value asset, even those with no directly related skill sets. "We look at core competency skills — leadership, project management, computer skills. These are very transferable across industries," Massa added. "We look at mid-career change individuals just like any other potential employee, such as recent college graduates. Diversified companies such as EMC will have a wide range of career opportunities they can grow into, regardless of where or how they started their career."

Massa also encourages later career change professionals to reconnect with their alumni associations from college and even previous employers. "Even if you've been out of school for 30, 40 years, alumni groups are a great resource for employment connections. The same applies to former employer groups — those people move on to other companies and other jobs too and can be a great source of employment information."

"These are interesting and challenging times for career changes," Massa said. "In times like this, there are many opportunities if you are pursuing the right avenues and channels."

*Jim Schakenbach is a freelance writer in Jefferson.*

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