



Low-Stress Jobs

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Rachel Zupek, CareerBuilder.com writer

Today's shaky economy has everyone a little strained. As job losses increase and positions are eliminated daily, people are thinking harder, putting in longer hours and willingly increasing their workloads, all in hopes of a little job security. All of the extra effort and worrying have workers feeling like they have the most stressful jobs in the world.

When the economy turns around, however, what will happen to your stress level at work? Will you continue running on empty to meet your basic job requirements or will you start to feel like your workplace pressure is back on an even keel?

To answer this question, it's important to understand how stress differs from a challenge.

"A workplace challenge puts a demand on you that temporarily goes beyond the routine level for your job," writes Laurence Shatkin in his book, "150 Best Low-Stress Jobs." Being more creative, paying extra attention details to or speeding up to meet a certain deadline are all examples of how a challenge might stress you out. You meet challenges willingly, however, because you know you have a reasonable chance of meeting the demand, he says.

"You can relax afterward, knowing that a similar demand won't arise for a while. Even if you don't meet the challenge, you still have the feeling that you might be able to tackle a similar demand in the future," Shatkin says. "Such challenges are the exception rather than the norm for your job."

Conversely, if the requirements exceed your abilities, you have reason to expect failure, and if the demand is your normal level of expected work rather than an exception, then you're dealing with stress, he says.

"The longer hours of work feel like a prison sentence; the competition and deadline pressure feel like a rat race," he says. "You feel frustrated and inadequate. You can't relax, even after successfully meeting one demand, because you know you will soon be hit with another that might overwhelm you."

Stress doesn't do a body -- or company – good

Workplace stress is arguably subjective since what is challenging or stressful to one person may not be to another. What exist invariably are its harmful effects, both to our bodies and productivity.

Forty percent of workers reported their job as "very or extremely stressful" in a study by Northwestern National Life, and 25 percent said their job is the No. 1 stressor in their lives. Additionally, health complaints are more strongly associated with problems at work than with any other life stressors, including financial or family problems, according to a study by the St. Paul Fire and Marine Insurance Company.

These problems add up: In the United States, about 1 million workers per day call in sick because of stress related illness, and worker stress is estimated to cost American businesses between \$50 billion and \$150 billion each year in health expenses and lost productivity, according to Shatkin.

Are you looking for a job with less stress? Here are 25 of the overall best low-stress jobs*, according to Shatkin's book.

1. **Computer software engineers, applications** Annual salary: \$79,780
2. **Computer systems analysts** Annual salary: \$69,760
3. **Sales managers** Annual salary: \$91,560
4. **Civil engineers** Annual salary: \$68,600
5. **Environmental scientists and specialists, including health** Annual salary: \$56,100
6. **Construction and building inspectors** Annual salary: \$46,570
7. **Environmental engineers** Annual salary: \$69,940
8. **Carpenters** Annual salary: \$36,550
9. **Bus and truck mechanics and diesel engine specialists** Annual salary: \$37,660
10. **Environmental science and protection technicians, including health** Annual salary: \$38,090
11. **Painters, construction and maintenance** Annual salary: \$31,190
12. **Mobile heavy equipment mechanics, except engines** Annual salary: \$40,440
13. **Cement masons and concrete finishers** Annual salary: \$32,650
14. **Natural sciences managers** Annual salary: \$100,080
15. **Industrial machinery mechanics** Annual salary: \$41,050
16. **Tile and marble setters** Annual salary: \$36,590
17. **Brickmasons and blockmasons** Annual salary: \$42,980
18. **Maintenance and repair workers** Annual salary: \$31,910
19. **Operations research analysts** Annual salary: \$64,650
20. **Water and liquid waste treatment plant and system operators** Annual salary: \$36,070
21. **Massage therapists** Annual salary: **\$33,400**
22. **Fitness trainers and aerobics instructors** Annual salary: \$25,910
23. **Civil engineering technicians** Annual salary: \$40,560
24. **Sheet metal workers** Annual salary: \$37,360
25. **Mechanical engineers** Annual salary: \$69,850

*Jobs were selected using relevant levels of work conditions, including but not limited to: stress tolerance; types of people dealt with daily; duration of typical work week; frequency of conflict; level of competition and time pressures. The jobs were then ranked based on median annual earnings, projected growth through 2016 and the number of job openings projected per year.

Rachel Zupek is a writer and blogger for CareerBuilder.com. She researches and writes about job search strategy, career management, hiring trends and workplace issues.