



## Securing a Training & Operations Career in Today's Economy

**The economic news is dismal: the credit industry is in collapse, and the Big Three automakers are on the brink of collapse, and if they go under, we can expect to see big losses in the manufacturing job sector. Most of these jobs broadly qualify as operations jobs, meaning they are part of a process that makes a company run smoothly.**

Looked at broadly enough, nearly any job is an operations job, from being a forklift driver to the planning officer in an organization. With the way the current economy is shaping up, there is going to be a famine in operations jobs, with the potential for big growth in this sector in late 2009, depending on what the Obama Administration manages to get passed by Congress in terms of a job stimulus bill.

Many of Obama's proposals for job preservation and creation are built around improving American manufacturing processes and a works program to generate more jobs in sustainable and renewable energy; these jobs, if they come about, are going to create a surge in demand for [operations jobs](#).

Consider this: America has been living off the great surge of road building and maintenance since the 1980s. Since the Reagan Administration, federal highway money has been increasing at a rate lower than that of inflation, while the population has grown by nearly 15 percent since 1980, and the number of cars on the road has more than doubled. It is now estimated that there are more cars in the United States than there are people.

Obama has promised a broad-based plan to rebuild America's infrastructure, which means there will be more jobs created throughout the country to repave and repair roads, maintain bridges, and upgrade traffic flow patterns. These jobs will not only employ the construction workers on the roads, but they will drive business to private contractors who provide concrete, rent out equipment, or provide the spare parts for the road construction machinery.

When that wave of orders come out, the next step will be hiring at the plants that make the parts to make the machinery, and when that happens, there will be a need for [operations positions](#) to handle the influx of new personnel, handle orders, and make sure the parts run out to where they are needed. (And of course, any time a factory opens up an assembly line other subsidiary jobs are created, both

at the facility and in surrounding businesses.) This is just one example of why [jobs in operations](#) have some significant potential for growth, at least in some segments of the American economy.

However, while there is potential for growth in [operations positions](#), it is still going to be a competitive market, particularly if the Big Three automakers have to let people go. It is time now to focus on the skills you will want to highlight when this crest of future jobs breaks.

You will want to focus on positions where you have had to be the final arbiter of details and procedures. Demonstrate that you have the capability to manage a full set of procedures and to manage people underneath you. When tailoring your resume, focus on jobs where your ability to plan has been a critical asset; highlight the problems you met, identified, isolated, adapted to, and overcame through your operations planning expertise.

Note that operations planning is not confined to what you do in the work place. Project management and operations management happen in a lot of organizations, from running a Boy Scout troop to organizing a church fundraiser. If you are the person who builds the lists of names, assigns the tasks, sets the schedules, and makes sure things get done, then even if it did not happen on the clock, it can be used to get your foot in the door for [operations employment](#). There is no standard certification; lots of MBAs have not learned the basics of how to manage small groups of people or how to lead under stress, so these activities tend to be tie breakers when you are evaluated for an operations position.

Once you are in the door with operations planning as a job, the salary is generally decent when compared to other middle-management positions; you have got responsibility and authority in broadly equal quantities, and the salary range, from \$40,000 to \$90,000 (and higher for people who go into the worlds of corporate boards) is appropriate to the task.



## Operations Career Feature

So, even if you are not employed right now in an operations position, it is important to focus on the things that can help you land a position in the future. Working within your community is another added benefit. If you are between jobs, take a look at enrolling in a few college classes at your local junior college in business management and process management to refresh yourself on some of the basics; a

background in how to read and write a balance sheet will also come in handy.

Good luck, and remember the axiom of operations work: "Failing to plan is planning to fail." Plan how you are going to get your next operations job in this economy.

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