

## Heather Boulger | Inside the Job Market: Why now is the best time to enroll in training

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The author says that, for those who have experienced disruptions to their careers this past year, deciding what to do next can be a challenge, especially when things are still so uncertain. Whether you're looking for a new job in 2021, making a career change, or planning to grow in your current job, all professionals should make a plan for upskilling/re-skilling.

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It has always been important to upskill or re-skill, but the economic and job uncertainty of 2020 has further hammered that point home.

We have all experienced many changes this past year because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some people have been laid off from their jobs, some are learning how to home-school their children, and some are experiencing a variety of other life changes.

For those who have experienced disruptions to their careers this year, deciding what to do next can be a challenge, especially when things are still so uncertain. Whether you're looking for a new job in 2021, making a career change, or planning to grow in your current job, all professionals should make a plan for upskilling/re-skilling.

While it's easy to focus on the negatives right now, it's important to recognize the opportunities this situation affords us as well. Here are some reasons why now is a great time to train, take a new class, or enroll in a degree program.

You may have more down time to focus on skill development. You can train remotely without worrying about transportation issues. Use this time to leverage social media and form online study groups.

Certificates make you more employable and help you retain your job. Keeping your skills sharp can help you stand out from your peers. Spending your free time investing in your career demonstrates self-discipline. You may increase your income.

Finally, certifications nearly always provide a measurable career boost.

You may be wondering how to start a more secure career or what is the best way to train for a new career. Even though it may be a little overwhelming to take the next step in your career journey, doing so now can get you ahead and help you reach your career goals faster.

The MassHire Berkshire Career Center can help you identify your strengths and opportunities for improvement, formulate a career plan, and outline a variety of education and training programs to help get you started! Please call 413-499-2220 and leave a message for our remote staff to contact you.

The Berkshire Workforce Board and Career Center have a number of entry-level training programs to help unemployed/underemployed residents gain skills and find employment. Recruitment is underway for Advanced Manufacturing training at McCann Tech and Berkshire Community College, as well as nursing assistant training in collaboration with Berkshire Health Systems and Berkshire Healthcare Systems.

If you are currently employed, it's equally as important to continuously upgrade your own skills.

Of the employees who remained in their roles in 2020, about 40 percent can expect that the core skills for that position will change and 50 percent of employees will need upskilling. Many Berkshire employers are aware of the value of investing in their employees and that, on average, employers expect to offer upskilling and re-skilling to just over 70 percent of employees by 2025.

Even if employers do step up their upskilling offerings, one fact remains: Professionals should take personal responsibility for their own upskilling/re-skilling plan! Determine your goals, chart your course and leverage your network. And, you never know when one of these skills could be leveraged into something that may grow your career, or even help you start a side business.

### Company training

While this past year has been hard on everyone, certain groups of people experience higher levels of daily worry at work.

Small-business owners are one of these groups, as are female business owners. Other groups are people with mental health problems, people who are called to work from home while also having to home-school their kids and people in abusive relationships at home.

And then there is the stress that comes from all the unexpected changes brought into a business due to COVID-19.

Employees feel uncertainty over whether they will be let go or furloughed, whether their compensation will change, or even whether their company will keep operating.

Work stress compounds the already high stress levels, leaving many people prone to burnout and panic attacks. Now more than ever, you need to make your employees feel safe.

Companies have to help employees handle all these changes from a distance. For that reason, transparency is key. Set regular updates of where the company is headed. Gather everyone on a Zoom call to inform them of your plans. Offer an open question-and-answer session on a regular basis for everyone who has concerns.

Along with transparency, make sure to offer continuous training.

According to a TalentLMS survey, 91 percent of companies and 81 percent of employees say upskilling/re-skilling training has boosted productivity at work. Why? Upskilling employees will not only help them feel like they can cope with the COVID-induced changes, it will also make them feel they remain an important part of the company's future.

An additional 66 percent of employees ranked the joy of learning new things and developing new skills as the top upskilling motivator. Another 80 percent of them said that upskilling/re-skilling training has boosted their confidence.

The Berkshire Workforce Board can help your company access Workforce Training Fund resources to help upgrade your workforce ([commcorp.org/wtftp](http://commcorp.org/wtftp)) and Safety Grants ([tinyurl.com/yt15jx87](http://tinyurl.com/yt15jx87)).

Upskilling employees is more than a strategic decision in order to maintain your staff's competitive edge. It's a way to offer them a sense of certainty and security during these highly uncertain times.

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