

BY JIM CARROLL



Goodbye, job

JOBS AREN'T US ANY MORE: NOW

WE HAVE SKILLS AND AN ATTITUDE

Talk to some people today, and you'll encounter individuals who are proud to say that they don't have a job, a steady income or any clear idea of how they might earn a living a year from now. Ask them what they wear to work, and they might answer "Pyjamas." Ask them their overriding career goal, and they might say, "Lifestyle." Ask them their title, and they'll tell ▶

you that economists have given them a variety of names.

They're temporary workers. Nomadic workers. Contingent workers. Independent contractors. Contract workers.

They're the vanguard of a very different economy, one in which people no longer have a job for life. In fact, it has become fashionable to have an attitude, not a job: "We've got skills that are needed by the corporate sector. If they want us, they'll have to hire us on our terms, which may include working part-time, on contract."

The last few years have seen the launch of the temporary economy, and the concept of job and career promises never to be the same again.

YESTERDAY

Most experts agree that until the mid-1800s, most people didn't have a "job"—instead, they worked for themselves. The economy, largely agricultural and entrepreneurial, saw many individuals eking out a living on the family farm or in a small-scale business that served the local community. Not surprising, in the era of the horse and buggy when it was difficult to travel any further!

This all changed as the industrial revolution took hold. Two developments proved to be of seminal importance: the invention of the automobile and (coincidentally in that same industry) the introduction of the modern day assembly line. Suddenly people had

mobility, allowing them easily to travel greater distances to go to work. Not only that, the modern manufacturing methods popularized by Henry Ford led to the creation of large-scale industrial enterprises, which needed many full-time employees in order to function.

Thus was born the concept of the job. By the 1950s, the transition in the economy was complete. Only a minority of people worked for themselves; the majority were salaried employees with full-time jobs. A romanticized version of the typical North American family was portrayed in TV shows such as *Leave It to Beaver* and *Father Knows Best*, in which dad wore a suit and went to work every day, while mom stayed home with the kids. Hollywood presented similar images. (Ironically enough, the movie that is still identified with the concept of unswerving job loyalty and job stability—*The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*—in fact portrayed a man who ultimately disliked his job powerfully enough to leave one company for another.)

Out in the real world, people bought into an implicit deal: work hard for the company, believe in the company, and receive job security in return.

TODAY

Attitudes like that died with the recession of the 1990s.

It was a period that some have come to call the "white collar recession." For the first time, professionals found their jobs and careers at risk, as a particularly nasty wave of economic restructuring took place. The period of down-

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sizing also led to a very significant change in the attitude that many people had toward the corporation.

Why? Because they came to believe that the corporate world no longer obeyed the social contract that had been in place for the past 100 years. People saw that the company they worked for might choose to let them go at any time, without warning. How could they possibly be loyal to a company that was no longer loyal to them?

Because of their change of attitude, many casualties of corporate restructuring decided not to seek another salaried, full-time job. Instead, as economists began to notice, they chose to take care of themselves by setting up their own small (and often home-based) companies. They would continue to offer their skills and talents to the corporate sector, but they'd do so on an independent, part-time basis.

This line of thinking fit nicely with

the corporate mindset of the 1990s. Given the ballooning size of severance packages, many large organizations had become reluctant to hire full-time staff. They were therefore delighted to hire the new, contingent workforce that was appearing before their very eyes.

TOMORROW

A growing number of us believe that technology will help to enshrine the concept of the nomadic workforce and that – as with everything else – the Internet will play a key role.

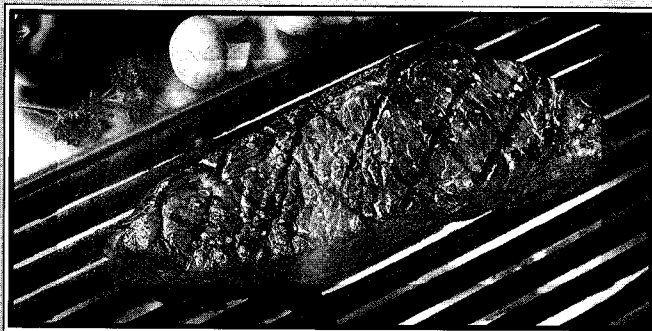
Why? The reason is simple: the Internet is the foundation for an economy in which a growing number of nomadic workers are able to serve an ever-increasing number of clients located far beyond their own immediate geographic area. The era of inexpensive global telecommunications is upon us – one in which e-mail, telephones, cellphones, faxes and video

conferencing allow people to work from anywhere, at any time. As a result, many more people will choose the independent route and, because of the lifestyle implications, will also choose to base their work at home.

Does this mean that – paradoxically enough – our modern technology will doom us to a new version of that small and confined world of the mid-1800s, in which our home and our workplace are but minutes apart? Not at all. Home-based workers realize that social interaction is still a key element of the working world. So even while they'll work at home, they'll also make frequent use of the automobile of the 21st century – the airplane. With a client base dispersed around the globe, “nomadic workers” will find that even though they don't have a job, their careers will continue to take them to far-flung places. ■

Independent contractor/nomadic worker Jim Carroll works, writes and frequently travels from home.

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