Trapped between flat salaries and ever-increasing workloads, IT professionals are feeling squeezed. Our annual survey of nearly 5,000 IT workers shows why job satisfaction is falling.

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**24** Find salary and bonus figures for 30 IT job titles, plus data by region and industry. Also, see key figures on workload expectations, perks, training and more.

**31** Competition for jobs is fierce, but experts say accepting the first offer that comes along is a mistake. Learn how to conduct a search that gets you a better job fit.

**33** Women at the midpoint of their careers are exiting the IT field at alarming rates. Yet unequal pay and fast-falling bonuses bear only part of the blame.
Pressed for higher productivity, yet pinched by flat wages, many IT workers are feeling the pressure. By Mary Brandel
It’s NOT EASY to stay positive in the Great Recession, protracted recovery or whatever phrase du jour is used to describe the current global economy. That’s why the mood in the IT department at The Sedona Group in Moline, Ill., stands out like a ray of sunshine on a dreary day.

It’s not that this IT group has escaped the squeeze that the IT staffs in most industries are feeling. Although there have been no layoffs within Sedona’s IT group, total compensation has taken a hit, and workloads have grown exponentially, says David Buzzell, CIO at the workforce management solutions provider. That experience is mirrored in IT organizations throughout the country, according to Computerworld’s 2010 Salary Survey, which paints a picture of IT professionals who are pressed for higher productivity, pinched by fixed wages and very nearly ready to explode.

According to the survey, everything is wrong-side up: Bonuses and benefits are way down, and workloads and work hours have increased. Meanwhile, salaries are stagnant (rising just a microscopic 0.7% on average), and — not surprisingly — satisfaction is on the wane (see charts, page 27).

“More responsibilities — with pay cuts and more-costly benefits — does not make employees happy,” says a technical services manager at a home furnishings retailer, who asked to remain anonymous. His bonus, which had represented 20% to 30% of his annual pay, was eliminated, he says, and his salary was frozen a few years back. Vacation was also cut, with workers required to earn it throughout the year, and they are now charged higher health insurance premiums.

But Sedona’s IT group has met its workload and compensation challenge with creativity and a recognition of what it takes to alleviate anxiety and maintain morale. For instance, the IT staff has looked at taking full advantage of low-cost benefits, such as training opportunities that are included.

“IT’s natural to feel trapped, and it’s natural to feel resentful at the rising expectations. But feeling stuck and resentful is a lethal combination.” — PAUL OLEN, MANAGEMENT CONSULTANT
IT Hiring Rebound?

IT job market observers such as Tom Silver, a senior vice president at Dice Inc., are seeing positive signs. The job count on Dice.com is up 7% over last year, he says, and it’s up 27% to 34% in key markets like New York and Silicon Valley. “It’s still down versus a couple of years ago, but we think it’s encouraging,” Silver says.

However, investments in long-term, visionary IT initiatives may not be the reason for the uptick in hiring, warns management consultant Paul Glen. The warming market may simply reflect the fact that businesses are finally pursuing projects that can no longer be deferred. In Computerworld’s 2010 Salary Survey, decreases were seen in the percentages of respondents who reported that their organizations had canceled projects (31%, down from 35% last year) and who reported budget cuts (61%, down from 65%). But once business starts to recover, it will still take at least a year for IT investments to start creeping back up, Glen predicts.

“There’s no sense of big, ambitious projects coming back this year,” he says.

The Sedona Group’s CIO, David Buzzell, agrees. “I still think business as a whole will be facing another tight year in 2010,” he says. “There will be pockets of recovery, [but] projects will still [find it] very hard to get buy-in unless they’re deemed critical or can easily return a quick ROI.”

Already, however, he’s feeling a greater sense of job security and hearing a lot less talk throughout the business world about potential cutbacks. In this year’s Salary Survey, the percentage of respondents who said they feel very secure or secure in their current positions rose from 54% in 2009 to 57% (see chart, page 27).

“The truth is, companies desperately need IT to move forward,” says a vice president at a luxury goods firm who asked not to be named.

Initially, contract positions will likely be more common than permanent jobs, Silver says. But the pay may start out lower than what IT contractors are accustomed to, Glen suggests, and the projects may not be as exciting as they once were.

And with unemployment still at 9.7%, talk of workers leaving their jobs in droves may be premature, says Glen, who foresees more of a “giant game of musical chairs.” But employers would do well to start identifying their most valuable employees and planning retention strategies. “It’s always your best people who are most attractive to your competitors,” he says. “And they’re the most difficult to replace.”

One CIO who asked to remain anonymous admitted he has begun taking a more critical view of his company’s approach to “making IT do without” and is reconsid- ering where he might want to be long term.

— MARY BRANDEL

I still think business as a whole will be facing another tight year in 2010. DAVID BUZZELL, CIO, THE SEDONA GROUP

He is also careful not to cut low-cost programs that provide a large boost to staff morale. For instance, Sedona has a PC purchase program through which it offers 18 months of 0% financing to people who want to purchase a home computer. In addition, “as computers come out of production, we offer older computers to staff members and their families for no cost,” Buzzell says. “Or within the IT department, we will use these older computers to often upgrade a staff member’s computer at home.”

Not that it’s been easy. “The demands and the workload are growing exponen- tially,” Buzzell says. “Between security risks, a more complex business environment and demands for increased functionality and innovation — but without the staff levels to take on more projects or funding to implement them — it’s hard to make progress.”

LICENSE TO GRUMBLE

Anecdotes illustrating the impact of the downturn abound in IT. And worker complaints are common in companies that don’t take steps to shore up morale, as Sedona does. As a vice president at a luxury goods manufacturer says, “Bigger workloads in IT are a result of all other departments attempting to improve productivity because of the smaller workforce. They need IT to help them with this, so there is even more work for us to do.” At the same time, he says, salaries were cut 10% across the board at his company and bonuses were eliminated, as was the 401(k) matching program.

In some cases, insult has followed injury. “We were told we were going to have new responsibilities and new systems we would have to manage,” the technical services manager says. “The next week, we were told to lay off two employees within the group that would have to do it.”

What’s particularly difficult for IT professionals is that, as engineers, they are devoted to ideas of progress and forward motion, says Paul Glen, a Computerworld columnist, author, management consultant and frequent speaker on the topic of managing IT professionals. “When things slow down and we’re just staying in place, it’s hard — it violates assumptions about our value,” he says. “We want to create innovation, lower costs, move things forward. But right now, it’s

Continued on page 22
Continued from page 20 mostly about keeping things running, and maintenance doesn’t feel like progress.”

Frustration stemming from low job satisfaction, even among people with a generally strong work ethic. The luxury goods maker vice president, for instance, sees signs that the desire to “go the extra mile” is waning. “People find it easier to schedule some vacation time, call in sick slightly more often and do not stay extremely late as much as before,” he says.

Others have simply hit bottom. “I feel very little to no importance is given to the IT department until something breaks,” says an IS manager at a cleaning supply company.

The mood is low enough that some observers foresee high IT turnover as the economy recovers and job opportunities open up. “I believe many IT personnel will be looking at changes in their career to explore new opportunities, learning experiences or simply just a change of pace,” Buzzell says.

Even now, adds the technical services manager, “just about everyone here is looking for a new way to provide for their families.”

COUNTERMOVES
Which brings us back to Sedona. Despite the economy, Buzzell says there’s been a fairly positive attitude within IT, thanks to measures he and the company have taken to alleviate anxiety. Those steps have included increased communication and visibility by the owners, who keep the staff up to date and informed on progress and trends within the industry.

“There is no more dangerous to morale than not knowing what’s coming next,” Buzzell says. Other steps include events that allow staff members to have fun while benefiting the community, like bowling and single-day work projects with groups like United Way.

Sometimes it’s the small things that really count. With salaries frozen, Buzzell purchased a powerful PC at Sam’s Club and allowed a staff member to borrow it as his home computer. During a project meeting, he discovered that this same staff member was working at home on a step of a new technical process that Buzzell wanted to explore at Sedona.

“Being able to provide him a much better machine for home, I know I will gain a lot of increased productivity at work,” Buzzell says.

“This opportunity has really impacted this individual, so for a very low cost, I’ve helped to increase productivity and greatly help build morale.”

In the end, Glen tells IT professionals who are frustrated with their circumstances — perhaps rightfully, in many cases — to resist getting wrapped up with the idea of money as a measure of personal value. “It’s a measure of the market,” he says. “My advice is to get over it. Be glad you’ve got a job at the moment. It’s natural to feel trapped, and it’s natural to feel resentful at the rising expectations. But feeling stuck and resentful is a lethal combination.”

Brandel is a Computerworld contributing writer. Contact her at marybrandel@verizon.net.

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**How We Conducted the Survey**

Computerworld’s 24th Annual Salary Survey was administered via the Internet. Responses from both Computerworld print subscribers and visitors to Computerworld.com were included in the survey results. The collection of survey data began on Sept. 30, 2009, and concluded on Dec. 21. A total of 5,275 people responded to the survey. Of those respondents, 4,852 were employed full or part time and were eligible to complete the entire survey. At the 95% confidence level, the margin of error for this sample size is 1.4 percentage points. Compensation figures for 2009 were calculated based on the percent-age change reported by the respondents.

**More Online:** For a detailed look at the survey methodology, visit computerworld.com/10/salaries.
Senior Management Positions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>JOB TITLE</th>
<th>AVERAGE SALARY</th>
<th>AVERAGE BONUS</th>
<th>2010 TOTAL</th>
<th>2009 TOTAL</th>
<th>CHANGE</th>
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<td>CIO/vice president of IT</td>
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Middle Management Positions

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<th>CHANGE</th>
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Staff and Entry-Level Positions

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<tr>
<th>JOB TITLE</th>
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<th>AVERAGE BONUS</th>
<th>2010 TOTAL</th>
<th>2009 TOTAL</th>
<th>CHANGE</th>
</tr>
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### Staff and Entry-Level Positions

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>JOB TITLE</th>
<th>AVERAGE SALARY</th>
<th>AVERAGE BONUS</th>
<th>2010 TOTAL</th>
<th>2009 TOTAL</th>
<th>CHANGE</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>$53,302</td>
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<td>Database administrator</td>
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<td>Database analyst</td>
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<td>Database architect/developer</td>
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<td>Help desk/tech support specialist</td>
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<td>$988</td>
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<td>Information security specialist</td>
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<td>Webmaster*</td>
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</table>

*90% of the respondents in this category reported no bonus.

### MONEY MOTIVATES

Only 8% of respondents said they wouldn’t consider changing jobs for any reason. But of those who would, these are the top five enticements:

1. Salary increase: 77%
2. Job security: 40%
3. Work/life balance: 39%
4. More vacation time: 32%
5. Large sign-on bonus: 32%

### HARD TIMES

What’s the biggest challenge facing workers in the IT industry today?

- IT talent shortage: 31%
- Other: 16%
- The economy: 13%
- Keeping up with technology advancements: 9%
- Outsourcing: 7%
- Alignment of IT with the business: 6%

### BUDGETS BEND

The top factors affecting working conditions:

- Budget cuts: 61%
- Increased workload (due to staff cuts): 53%
- Salary freeze: 53%
- Hiring freeze: 46%
- Permanent staff layoffs: 44%
- Training cuts: 36%
- Canceled project(s): 31%
- Contract staff layoffs: 22%
- Increased outsourcing: 19%
- Salary cuts: 16%
- Merger/acquisition: 13%
- Unpaid work furloughs: 9%
- Contract/consultant hires: 9%
- Decreased outsourcing: 4%
- Increased hiring/staffing: 3%
A Sampling of Average Total Compensation by Region

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<th>Job Title</th>
<th>New England</th>
<th>Middle Atlantic</th>
<th>South Atlantic</th>
<th>North Central</th>
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<td>$120,470</td>
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<td>$126,581</td>
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</table>

Satisfaction Meter

**MONEY**

How satisfied are you today with your total compensation package?

- **Satisfied**: 39%
- **Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied**: 19%
- **Dissatisfied**: 23%
- **Very dissatisfied**: 15%
- **Very satisfied**: 15%

**CURRENT JOB**

How satisfied are you with your current job?

- **Very satisfied**: 45%
- **Satisfied**: 18%
- **Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied**: 15%
- **Dissatisfied**: 15%
- **Very dissatisfied**: 19%

**SECURITY**

How secure do you feel your job is?

- **Secure**: 29%
- **Somewhat secure**: 35%
- **Not very secure**: 22%
- **Very not secure**: 10%

**STRESS**

How stressful is your job?

- **Stressful**: 39%
- **Somewhat stressful**: 29%
- **Not very stressful**: 18%
- **Very not stressful**: 13%

**BASE FOR ALL SATISFACTION CHARTS: 4,852 RESPONDENTS**
A Sampling of Average Total Compensation by Industry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CIO/vice president of IT</th>
<th>Director of IT</th>
<th>IT manager</th>
<th>Project manager</th>
<th>Help desk/tech support specialist</th>
<th>Technology/business systems analyst</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health care</td>
<td>Manufacturing (noncomputer) $166,092</td>
<td>Manufacturing (noncomputer) $128,427</td>
<td>Computer services/consulting $98,650</td>
<td>Education $43,864</td>
<td>Education $65,797</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banking</td>
<td>Education $132,343</td>
<td>Education $95,824</td>
<td>Telecommunications $93,962</td>
<td>Computer services/consulting $61,354</td>
<td>Computer services/consulting $91,089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer services/consulting $170,240</td>
<td>Health care $107,146</td>
<td>Government $79,613</td>
<td>Defense/aerospace $118,342</td>
<td>Manufacturing (noncomputer) $48,758</td>
<td>Government $76,486</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>$150,861</td>
<td>Health care $87,874</td>
<td>Banking $97,168</td>
<td>Government $53,439</td>
<td>Legal/insurance/real estate $85,858</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>$134,325</td>
<td>Computer services/consulting $102,075</td>
<td>Education $97,936</td>
<td>Government $54,591</td>
<td>Health care $72,550</td>
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<td>Legal/insurance/real estate $101,757</td>
<td>Government $94,442</td>
<td>Manufacturing (noncomputer) $72,665</td>
<td>Finance/accounting $92,556</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale trade $222,885</td>
<td>Network administrator $167,787</td>
<td>Computer services/consulting $130,940</td>
<td>Health care $101,065</td>
<td>Banking $47,210</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment/marketing/advertising</td>
<td>Network engineer $98,650</td>
<td>Computer services/consulting $147,323</td>
<td>Telecommunications $100,620</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing (noncomputer) $58,513</td>
<td>Programmer/analyst $77,355</td>
<td>Manufacturing (noncomputer) $74,469</td>
<td>Systems administrator $77,663</td>
<td>Systems administrator $112,307</td>
<td>Computer services/consulting $112,422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>$58,384</td>
<td>Manufacturing (noncomputer) $70,426</td>
<td>Computer services/consulting $82,761</td>
<td>Legal/insurance/real estate $112,422</td>
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<td>Computer services/consulting $71,519</td>
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<td>Education $68,961</td>
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<td>Finance/accounting $105,830</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance/accounting $62,598</td>
<td>Transportation/logistics $64,131</td>
<td>Energy/utilities $88,108</td>
<td>Manufacturing (noncomputer) $69,242</td>
<td>Manufacturing (computer) $124,240</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**RED TEXT:** The total base for this job title in this particular industry was fewer than 30 responses but more than 15. These figures should be used for comparison only, because they don’t constitute a statistically significant sampling.

**GREY TEXT:** The total base for this job title in this particular industry was fewer than 16 responses but more than nine. These figures should be used for comparison only.
As the economy shows signs of slowly emerging from the recession, companies are beginning to resume projects put on hold. The latest Robert Half Technology IT Hiring Index and Skills Report shows that nearly 80% of technology executives are confident in their companies’ prospects for growth in the second quarter.

As your company starts to move forward again, keeping key personnel will be critical to your efforts. But retaining your most valued employees may not be as easy as you think. A separate survey by Robert Half International and CareerBuilder found that 55% of workers plan to change employers, careers or industries when conditions improve. Your team may already be thinking about opportunities with other employers or be targeted by competitors that are ramping up their staffing levels.

Compensation remains one of the most powerful retention tools, but what if your organization isn’t in a position to offer big raises or lavish bonuses? By taking a creative approach to retention, you can uncover powerful new ways to keep your best people on board.

- **Career development.** Ernst & Young creates a personalized career development map for every employee. This framework helps staffers see where they are, where they can go within the organization and, as specifically as possible, how they can get there.

- **Work/life balance.** Accenture’s “future leave” policy lets employees put some of their salary into an account that funds a future sabbatical to address other priorities in their lives.

- **Recognition.** Marriott International celebrates 10 outstanding employees with a gala celebration at company headquarters. The event demonstrates the value the company puts on exceptional work.

While these particular programs may not fit your organization, they exemplify the fundamental concept behind rethinking retention: taking the time and making the effort to customize retention efforts based on your employees’ needs and concerns, rather than merely providing the “standard” offerings.

That means the first step is listening to your team and finding out what they value. What types of rewards or programs would they appreciate most? Even if you can’t fulfill their every wish, their input can spark improvements, help you avoid unwise investments and serve as inspirations for the future, when your company may be able to incorporate their suggestions. Some companies even use the input they get from staffers to create a list of reward options, letting each employee choose what he wants.

Creative retention efforts can start small. Coffee sessions with company leaders can promote a sense of unity and openness. You might also consider ways to contribute to your employees’ overall well-being. Gym memberships or other health-centered programs can build a more personal connection between the firm and its workers. Another possibility is to support positive lifestyle choices — with allowances for environmentally friendly transportation, for example.

Remember, though, that even the most creative initiative can go stale. Periodically review your retention programs and determine whether they still make sense by finding out what employees think, either through informal conversations or formal surveys.

Innovative retention programs draw part of their power from the effort that goes into devising and implementing them. Such initiatives demonstrate an employer’s willingness to devote time and energy to understanding — and then trying to fulfill — employees’ needs. The result can be the type of bond that keeps a key staff member on board when opportunity starts knocking.

**By taking a creative approach to retention, you can uncover powerful new ways to keep your best people on board.**

**Dave Willmer** is executive director of Robert Half Technology, a provider of IT professionals.
THE New Job Search

Don’t snooze through the recovery. Spend your time building skills, scouting out hot job segments and priming for what’s next. By Mary K. Pratt

T he days when a decent résumé could get you into the right position are gone. Now more than ever, career experts say, you have to take a strategic approach to your job search and application process. And you have to pursue that strategy all the time, not just when you’re in the market for new opportunities. The best candidates are always taking steps to manage their careers, assess the market and build relationships to keep them employed during good times and bad.

“You have to do everything you can to get the right job.

You’ve got to maximize your opportunities. You’ve got to use all the tools at your disposal,” says Allison Nawoj, a career adviser at CareerBuilder LLC in Chicago.

That’s particularly true in this economy. Of the 2,090 manager-level respondents to Computerworld’s 2010 Salary Survey, 47% said their companies will hire new IT staffers in the coming year. However, cutbacks and layoffs have made competition for those positions fierce.

This new reality might push job seekers (particularly unemployed ones) to take whatever comes along. But that approach is short-sighted — and old-fashioned, says Thuy Sindell, vice president of client services and a leadership development coach at Mariposa Leadership Inc., a San Francisco-based career consultancy for managers.

Companies in this modern global economy will create or tailor jobs for top-notch workers, if you know how to look for such opportunities, says Sindell, co-author of The End of Work As You Know It. “Sometimes jobs are created for certain people, so that means talking to a former colleague about current initiatives and then saying, ‘That sounds very exciting, and here’s how I can help,’ ” she says.

But because most people don’t get hired that way, Sindell says savvy job seekers pursue all channels to find positions that could be good matches for them. They check in with current and former colleagues, recruiters and search firms, visit job sites and attend career fairs.

The successful ones then tailor their résumés and pitches to fit each situation, she says. So you need to understand what you bring to the table and what you want your employer to offer, too.

EVER-ESSENTIAL RÉSUMÉ

Résumés still matter, says Ryan Erving, a director of business development who puts his company’s IT consultants in front of hiring managers all the time. He points to one quality assurance tester who was perfect for two recent job openings but didn’t initially attract the attention of potential employers. Erving says the tester’s résumé was too generic, so he pushed him to write up a few points on his deep experience in performance- and load-balancing Web servers. The hiring managers took a closer look, and one quickly extended an offer.

“This is a worker who thought his résumé was good enough and didn’t spend time to articulate what set him apart,” Erving says.

To make sure you don’t get lost in a pile of résumés, it’s important to translate your tech skills into top- and bottom-line business values, says Dave Willmer, executive director at IT staffing firm Robert Half Technology.
in Menlo Park, Calif.

“You have to be able to speak to what the business impact was in terms of your responsibilities,” says Willmer, a Computerworld columnist. Hiring managers want to know that your skills can deliver business results, whether it’s reducing downtime because you resolve help desk calls quickly or because you can deliver a Web product that will help generate more sales.

But getting the right job means more than knowing what you offer. You should also know what to expect when you get there. You need to make sure your next employer isn’t going bankrupt or planning to offshore its IT services. You want to ask about managers’ styles and company culture, so you don’t end up in an unsuitable environment.

You can get much of this information in advance, Sindell says. Financial statements, industry reports and news stories provide insight into the stability and structure of the company.

Your network can help, too. Sindell notes. Chances are you know someone who can connect you with a current or past employee who can get you the inside scoop. From there, be sure to ask pointed questions during your interviews so you can get information on the things that matter most to you.

“Obviously, the temptation is to try to figure out how to get a job as quickly as possible,” Erving says. “But you need to have a place where you can work well with the organization.”

**GETTING THAT GOOD FIT**

Erving himself took that approach when he moved into his current job at Systems Integration Solutions Inc. in Walnut Creek, Calif., about two years ago. He used LinkedIn to make contacts at the company and learn about the culture there. He prepared thoughtful questions that would help him understand the company’s history and future, and he asked for an extra round of interviews so he could get to know more people.

“At the end of the day, there’s only so much you can figure out from the interview process. It’s a leap of faith. But if you can minimize the distance of that leap, the odds of you landing are better,” he says.

Continually managing your career will give you a better shot of securing the right job when you need or want it, says Adam Alexander, vice president at MasteryWorks Inc., a career consultancy in Falls Church, Va.

“A career plan should be an ongoing process so you’re always in a good situation or trying to improve your situation,” he explains. That means thinking about what positions you want next, determining whether you can find them at your current company, getting the skills you need to move into those positions, and building relationships with people who can get you there.

“Everyone has to take an active role in their careers, whether they’re looking or not,” Alexander says.

That approach paid off for Luis Illanas, a 20-year IT veteran who was unexpectedly laid off in November from his job as a systems administrator. He quickly contacted more than two-dozen former colleagues to let them know he was in the job market. As a result of his solid network, he landed a position as a senior IT consultant at KDSA Consulting LLC in North Andover, Mass., within two weeks.

“I can’t say enough about having someone who knows how you work and how much that helped,” he says. “That’s why, when you’re working with anyone, you have to make a good impression. You never know when you might call that person for a job.”

**Time to Pack Your Bags?**

Job prospects for techies aren’t evenly dispersed. Some sectors are doing better than others — such as defense/aerospace, where bonuses increased by 19% and salaries by 2.2%. Some regions are doing better than others too. For example, in the West and South Central U.S., IT workers saw slight increases in their total compensation (see charts, page 27).

Such statistics might entice people to enter a new industry or move to another part of the country.

Adam Alexander, vice president at career consultancy MasteryWorks, says IT professionals are generally open to switching industries, but many are reluctant to move to new regions.

“Geography can be an impediment to career growth. Even with promotions, people will often turn them down if it means moving,” he says. “I think it does hurt their careers.”

While Alexander says staying put can be detrimental to career growth, he and others acknowledge that the decision to relocate is a personal matter.

“It’s really around values and what’s important to you,” says Thuy Sindell, a leadership development coach at Mariposa Leadership. Some want to be close to their families or certain cities and are willing to forgo opportunities. Others put their careers ahead of other considerations and will move anywhere for a better position. Still others simply like the adventure of moving and seek jobs that let them experience new places.

Dave Willmer, executive director of Robert Half Technology, says the key is to be flexible.

“Today’s economy demands flexibility to a certain extent,” he says. If you’re not willing to move, you might have to be more flexible on, say, the industry you work in or your salary.

However, while flexibility is still important, Willmer says it’s not as crucial as it was just several months ago, particularly for those who have in-demand skills, such as business intelligence expertise.

— MARY K. PRATT
Shrinking Female IT Workforce

Women in middle management are leaving the IT profession at an alarming rate. The struggling economy may be a help — or a hindrance — in keeping them. By Stacy Collett

LAST YEAR, programmer Nancy Sheets was forced to take a 20% pay cut along with the rest of the IT department at a Wisconsin-based plastics company, while everyone else working there took a 10% reduction in salary. IT staff also acquiesced to two weeks of unpaid vacation, while the rest of the company took one week of unpaid leave — all to ensure that the four IT employees kept their jobs. “I was happy to keep my job, but also I couldn’t afford the 20% cut with my husband working,” says Sheets, 55, the only woman in her IT department. Her husband, who had worked as an IT manager at a different company, has been out of work for 14 months.

Sheets likes her work, but she wonders what a job outside of IT would be like. For now, however, she’s had to put such musings on hold. “I’m supporting the family,” she notes.

Many women in IT found themselves in a similarly precarious position in 2009. In January, the unemployment rate for men held at 10%, while it hovered at 7.9% for women, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. While male CIOs earned an average of $177,843, female CIOs earned $148,965. Male application development managers earned an average of $114,610, while women with the same title earned $106,679. Perhaps more alarming, the average bonus for women fell 15.5% in 2009, while the average bonus for men in IT declined 5.6%, according to Computerworld’s survey.

So it’s not surprising that women are leaving their jobs at slightly lower rates than they were in previous years, according to the Center for Work-Life Policy. What’s more, about 39% of women are outearning their husbands. “When the woman is the primary breadwinner, she’s also less likely to leave her job,” says Laura Sherbin, director of research at the New York-based CWLP. But for women in IT, the salary picture tends to be less rosy. IT salaries for both men and women stagnated in the past year, according to Computerworld’s 2010 Salary Survey, and earnings disparities between men and women remained in place.

But women in IT find themselves in a similarly precarious position in 2009. In January, the unemployment rate for men held at 10%, while it hovered at 7.9% for women, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. While male CIOs earned an average of $177,843, female CIOs earned $148,965. Male application development managers earned an average of $114,610, while women with the same title earned $106,679. (See more comparisons in charts at right.) Perhaps more alarming, the average bonus for women fell 15.5% in 2009, while the average bonus for men in IT declined 5.6%, according to Computerworld’s survey.

Women in IT: the Facts.

Women don’t leave IT jobs primarily because of pay disparities, but salary does play a role in the subtle, unconscious biases often held by IT leaders,” says Catherine Ashcraft, senior research scientist at the National Center for Women & Information Technology (NCWIT) at the University of Colorado. “One way biases play out is evaluations, performance reviews; that definitely affects the salaries. There is that discrepancy, but it’s not as great between men and women in technology as it is overall.”

Lower salaries lead to women dropping out of the IT workforce when child care and other expenses start outweighing the income benefits. “Women make these kinds of calculations. Certainly a lower salary is not helping them stay in the workforce,” Sherbin says.

Those frequent calculations have led to an ongoing exodus of women from IT, especially in middle management, according to the 2009 NCWIT study “Women in IT: The Facts.” Some 74% of women in technology report “loving their work,” yet those women leave their careers at a staggering rate. About 56% of technical women leave at the “midlevel” point, more than double the quit rate of men.

Researchers blame the midcareer departures most often on isolation, a dearth of mentors, and a lack of access to the types of networks that men have. Ashcraft says. Another factor is “competing responsibilities and work-life balance issues,”

Catherine Ashcraft, Senior Research Scientist, National Center for Women & Information Technology

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she adds. “A lot of people think [of choosing] a tech career because it involves technology that can be done more flexibly from home. It can, but you have the flexibility to work all the time!”

But for women who choose to stay in IT, the glass ceiling appears to be coming down. “In the last few years we’ve seen an increase of female CIOs in major companies,” as well as an increase in women in the IT workforce, says Carolyn Leighton, founder and CEO of Women In Technology International, a professional association.

Indeed, the percentage of women CIOs or executive vice presidents of technology at 1,000 leading companies rose to 16.4% in 2009, up from 12% in 2007, according to recruiting firm Sheila Greco Associates LLC. Deborah Lindell, CIO at the Delaware Department of Corrections, credits her success to the fact that she has worked with a lot of people, nearly all of them men, who gave her opportunities. “They found my brand of salesmanship and persuasiveness intriguing, and they liked how I approached a business problem from a technical perspective,” says Lindell, 50, who is married with one child. She also made seven or eight lateral moves in 14 years at her previous employer. That mobility helped her stay engaged at a point in her career when she might otherwise have left IT. “I saw something that needed to be done and asked for the challenge. I did that a number of times, and when you are successful, people believe in you,” she explains.

WOMEN IN THE MIDDLE

Some women in midlevel IT management say the lifestyle suits them just fine.

Lorraine Spencer doesn’t plan on leaving her middle-management IT position at Johns Hopkins University anytime soon — even though there’s a salary freeze and staffers aren’t getting bonuses. At the Office of Continuing Medical Education, Spencer has found a perfect niche for her lifestyle and some benefits beyond bonuses. She enjoys a 37.5-hour workweek and has opportunities to move into different IT positions within the university.

“Universities are fabulous places to work for women,” Spencer says. “I intentionally came here because it’s a better work-life balance. There seem to be more opportunities for advancement for women. Our CIO is a woman.”

What’s more, the university will pay half of her son’s tuition at any U.S. college or university — a perk offered to anyone who has worked there more than two years.

FILLING THE POOL

Ashcraft worries about the future of innovation if the pool of women in technology should continue to decline. “It isn’t just about equity and fairness, though that’s important, too,” she says. “But it’s also about the harm it does to innovation to have one relatively similar group of people designing the new technologies that are being consumed by a diverse range of people. To the extent that the talent pool becomes more similar, that creative innovation is at risk.”

Companies are making strides toward closing the gap on women’s pay and opportunities every day. Google, for example, has joined the CWLP to develop policies for employees with children. “A lot more companies are making this commitment and designing programs to help women,” Sherbin says. “We hope it’s a very positive outlook.”

Collett is a Computerworld contributing writer. Contact her at stcollett@aol.com.
While salaries have remained flat, individual responsibilities and work hours have increased. The question now for IT managers is whether the fear of not being able to find another job is the only factor keeping employees on board.

Consider this anecdote: In December, I found myself on the West Coast talking with senior leadership of a large (and well-known) media company. One particular division is oriented toward the development and deployment of a certain (equally well-known) social media tool. The senior vice president of human resources for that division clearly articulated that while economic conditions are certainly affecting the business, they are having almost no impact on overall retention rates. He still has to pay top dollar for hard-to-find talent, and he has to work creatively to keep the necessary mix of technical skills in-house. It’s a reality, he said, that keeps him awake at night and makes him wary of the eventual recovery. Those challenges will grow even more daunting as the job market warms up.

So how do you stem the talent exodus? To improve job satisfaction, consider taking these steps, which will lay the foundation for aggressive recruiting and retention strategies when the talent wars return.

1. Offer creative alternative benefits. Evaluate the demographics of your IT staff to identify alternative benefits that could boost your employees’ job satisfaction. For instance, 401(k) contributions or extensive health insurance coverage might not be important to younger employees. But those staffers might be interested in credits toward technology purchases, opportunities to pursue technical training, fitness club memberships and so on.

2. Implement internship-style staffing rotations. Consider adopting a rotating schedule that, every few months, moves teams across disciplines. This lets employees experience new situations, expand their skill sets and avoid monotony. If you challenge employees and give them new opportunities, it shows that you’re invested in their professional development.

3. Share budgeting responsibilities. Constricted budgets don’t have to be an obstacle to improving employee satisfaction and retention. Try sharing budgeting responsibilities across the entire staff. Instead of handing down the “thou shalt nots” of corporate finance, clearly articulate your organization’s cost containment objectives. Then offer incentives to employees who can find creative ways to achieve those goals while preserving speed and quality of delivery. This requires strong communication, but it will help your staff feel connected to the budgeting process rather than seeing spending restrictions as dire impositions handed down from upper management.

4. Promote personal branding. Educate employees on how to improve their personal brands and employability. Help them increase their personal search engine optimization. Assist employees in leveraging social media tools to define their work successes. Give them incentives for speaking at trade shows or contributing to IT blogs. While this might seem risky, since it would bring your staffers’ talents to the attention of other employers, it could foster a sense of loyalty within the ranks.

Such strategies might not be easy to implement, and they most certainly require deep collaboration with HR. But since job satisfaction rates are so low these days, it would almost be negligent of you not to explore new ways to improve morale.

Joel Capperella is senior vice president of client solutions at Yoh, a talent and outsourcing services provider.