

What are Smart Track Jobs?



Smart Track Jobs are entry-level jobs that allow you to get your foot in the door, gain experience, attain important benefits, and move toward a better future.

They are called *Smart Track Jobs* because you have to ask **smart** questions and do **smart** research to identify these opportunities. These are the *opposite* of dead-end jobs because they lead you down a promising path.

Different jobs will promote success for different people. So you need to evaluate each job in terms of your own unique situation. Here are some things to consider.

- **Family-Friendliness**
- **Potential for Promotion**
- **Benefits Available**
- **Transferable Skills**
- **Training**
- **Job Stability**

Is it Family-Friendly?

If you have family obligations, a job will only work if it can accommodate those obligations. So think carefully about those realities. Ask yourself things like:

- Does it have a set schedule every week so I can plan ahead for child care?
- Are the hours flexible if I need to be able to pick up or drop off children?
- Are there any benefits that might especially help my family, such as pre-tax programs to pay for child care (flexible spending account), or on-site child care?
- Is this job realistic for me in terms of commute/transportation, personal likes and dislikes, personal health and safety, and future aspirations?

Potential for Promotion?

Smart Track jobs will lead you to a higher wage. So you need to know if your starting hourly rate will increase as you become more skilled at your job. Ask your potential employer about opportunities for learning on the job and further advancement.

Benefits Packages?

Benefits are **health insurance, retirement plans (pension or 401K), paid vacation time, paid sick leave, pre-tax savings accounts to pay for child care and medical care, and tuition assistance.**

For many large companies, you can get a general overview of the benefits packages from their Web sites. This is often the best place to start. You can also call the human resources department and ask them to describe the benefits available. You don't have to identify yourself but can just say you are making a general inquiry as a potential job seeker. It is generally not a good idea to ask a lot of detailed questions about benefits until you have been offered a position. Once offered a job, ask not only what benefit programs a company has but the costs associated with them, how many hours you need to work each week to be eligible for benefits, and how many months of work must pass before your benefits start.

What Transferable Skills will you learn?

Transferable skills are the processes or tasks that you learn at a job and take with you to your next job. These could be:

- understanding and meeting the needs of a customer
- communicating professionally over the phone or through email
- running a cash register
- entering information into a database
- operating office machines like a fax or copier
- driving a large vehicle

Evaluate a job description to see what skills are required and what skills you can acquire on the job. It is important to think about whether some of the skills you will be learning are *new skills* that can expand your future job opportunities. Smart Track Jobs keep you gaining skills and using them to help you move forward.

Is there Job Stability?

You want to concentrate your efforts and obtain new skills in industries that are stable and where there are likely to have job openings in the future. Consider working with a career specialist or using other resources to learn whether the field you are entering is growing one with opportunities in the future.

General Tips

While you want to learn as much as you can about potential jobs and make the most informed decision possible, you also need to be smart about how you go about gathering information. Put yourself in the employer's shoes and ask yourself what they want when they are hiring for a position. For example:

- Do they want someone who seems to care more about the benefits than the job?
- Do they want someone who seems to be more interested in immediate promotion over the job they are currently applying for?

Not really. Employers want motivated employees but they also want someone who is easy to work with, appreciative of their job, respectful of their supervisor, and a team player. One way you can show this in an interview is by the kinds of questions you ask.

DO ask during an interview:

- What do you consider to be the most important traits in a valuable employee?
- Are there opportunities to learn new skills and obtain job-related training as part of this work?
- Are there internal opportunities for promotion for high achievers?
- What makes this a particularly good place to work?
- What are the hours for the position and are they likely to remain the same?

AFTER you have been offered a job you can ask about:

- Flexible work hours, benefits packages, and salary (which should be part of the job offer).

Often when we are job seeking we feel a lot of pressure to find a job, any job, RIGHT NOW. While being unemployed is frightening, it can really pay off in the long run to find a job that is the right fit for you and that offers a more promising future. You may do yourself a disservice by taking a job that doesn't work out. Employers like to see long-term commitments to past jobs. Keep that in mind when you are looking and make that next job a **Smart Track Job!**