

Would You Hire a Job Hopper?

By CC Holland

Your team has an opening and you're down to two strong candidates. Candidate A has excellent qualifications and has been at her current position for six years. Candidate B has equally strong credentials but has held six jobs in the last six years. Which one do you hire?

According to executive search expert Tim Tolan, Candidate A should be more appealing because she doesn't exhibit, as he puts it, "career ADD." He makes a strong argument that serial hoppers need to "find their pond and stay for a while."

To me, that's old-fashioned thinking. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, today's average American will have had 10 jobs between the ages of 18 and 38. Do the math: That's a new job every other year. What's that if not job-hopping?

While a checkered work past requires some investigation from a hiring manager — after all, you don't want to discover that your new hire left her old jobs because she's inept or has the pesky habit of showing up at the stroke of noon — I don't buy into the argument that it's a death blow to a resume.

In fact, I think that different industries understand or even embrace the peripatetic professional. In journalism, you're expected to move around; staying in one spot too long, especially if you're a young reporter, kind of makes you look unmotivated and lazy. The tech industry also embraces the wandering worker. By contrast, the financial world can provide the kind of infrastructure and advancement opportunities to allow someone to remain in place, without complacency, for years. (My better half has been rising through the ranks at a national bank for a staggering 16 years now.)

So think twice before you condemn a candidate for his variegated vocations. You don't want to pass up a potential superstar because you're afraid he or she has career ADD.