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Rating the Nation's Best and Worst Jobs

By Tony Lee

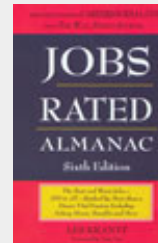
Many of us dream of finding the perfect spouse, a fantastic place to live and the absolute best college education for our kids. But most romances, house hunts and academic pursuits aren't as perfect as we'd hoped. Your spouse is loving and understanding, but snores. A house is large and airy, but expensive to heat. A university offers exactly the fields of study your child seeks, but is far from home.

Your perfect job may also come with a trade-off or two. But the likelihood of having to accept trade-offs will be small if your abilities mesh well with any of the nation's best careers. Fortunately, there are many great jobs out there, which means the odds that you can find your perfect profession may be greater than you think.

According to this year's edition of "Jobs Rated Almanac" by Les Krantz (Barricade Books, 2002), the nation's single best job in terms of low stress, high compensation, lots of autonomy, tremendous hiring demand and several other key criteria, is biologist. Of course, the terrorist attacks and related anthrax and chemical weapons fears are an obvious reason why biologists are in demand and receiving greater respect from their employers. But several long-awaited developments have had a great impact, such as the recent completion of the human genetic map, which has made bioengineering possible, and genetically altered agriculture, which is changing the ways in which the world's populations will eat for years to come.

Other [top-rated jobs](#) are somewhat less awe-inspiring, yet may still qualify as perfect if they match your skills and interests. Financial planners, last year's No. 1 ranked job, still makes a strong showing in the No. 3 spot, as aging baby boomers continue to seek help managing their money, both to fund their children's college educations, and to prepare for their fast-approaching retirements. Actuaries, who work autonomously and with little stress helping insurance providers

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and others determine risk, rose to No. 2, while computer-systems analysts and accountants round out the top five.

The jobs were analyzed according to six key criteria -- environment, income, employment outlook, physical demands, security and stress -- using data from such sources as the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and the U.S. Census Bureau, as well as studies from trade associations and industry groups. The lower the score, the higher the ranking.

Lumberjacks were ranked at the bottom of the list as the [nation's worst job](#). Their careers couldn't be much rougher in terms of work instability, poor pay and pure danger. Prospects aren't much better for commercial fishermen, cowboys, ironworkers and seamen, who labor aboard commercial ships among pirates and hurricanes.

-- *Mr. Lee is editor in chief and general manager of CareerJournal.com and co-author of "Jobs Rated Almanac" with Les Krantz (Barricade Books, 2002), from which this article has been adapted.*

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