I've seen a lot of signs like this in recent months in restaurant and business windows where I live in Northeast Ohio. With the reopening of the economy and warmer weather, businesses here and across the US are eager to fill positions, but many say they are having trouble finding workers, especially in the leisure and hospitality industry.

One reason this could be happening—despite the 9.3 million job openings in the US in April—is that workers are making a change. More than half of US adults who were unemployed or furloughed during the pandemic were seriously considering changing jobs or fields, according to a Pew Research Center survey.

I recently interviewed one of these workers. Vanessa Smith lives in Cleveland, works in leisure and hospitality, and was furloughed for several months in 2020. She returned to her job in September (with a pay cut and no more employer
contributions to her retirement plan) and said, “there are times when I wonder if I should switch fields.”

A new tool—the Occupational Mobility Explorer, linked in this issue below—can help people do just that. It shows similar but higher-paying jobs in your area and can help you build a new career path. Even if you’re not actively looking to make a change, it’s helpful to learn how your skills can apply to other careers. I compared my occupation, “Writers and Authors,” to “Architects, Except Landscape and Naval” (one of my interests), and there are more similarities than I thought, namely creativity and communication skills.

What about for you? Which in-demand skills do you have that could transfer to another job?

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Michelle Volpe-Kohler
Senior Writer at the Cleveland Fed

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OUR COMMUNITIES
What We’re Hearing and Seeing

Throughout the pandemic, the University of Cincinnati Student Enterprise Program (StEP) store faced the challenge of pivoting its in-person store, which reaches more than 5,000 elementary students in Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky schools, to being remote during the school year. The StEP store sells stuffed toys and school supplies such as pencils, erasers, folders, markers, and crayons.

Even though times were challenging, teachers continued to allow their students to participate in the University of Cincinnati StEP store. Prepandemic, volunteers would visit elementary schools to engage with students to help them make purchases. During the pandemic, we fulfilled orders from the University of Cincinnati. This allowed volunteers to engage with students to guide them to make the best buying decisions using fake StEP store bucks they earned for good behavior.

When I saw this school year what the elementary school students were buying from the StEP store, it seemed clear to me that students wanted to get back outside to play. I watched students purchase Frisbees, jump ropes, and basketballs. Clearly, students were tired of being in the house and on Zoom for class. Often, they bought multiples of the same item to give to friends and family. It was refreshing to see how thoughtful and understanding of others’ needs these youth were.

The small staff in the Economics Center at the University of Cincinnati relies on volunteers and donations to keep this program active and to instill the importance of making positive choices in school that can lead to positive rewards in the future. In addition, students can donate their fake bucks to a charity of their choice, which encourages civic responsibility.

The pandemic didn’t keep volunteers from helping the University of Cincinnati to continue this program, and I’m proud to have been one of them. If you have the opportunity to volunteer, I highly recommend the University of Cincinnati StEP store. I got involved through the Cleveland Fed’s Fed It Forward volunteer program, one way our Bank’s people work to make a difference in our communities. I’m looking forward to volunteering in person next school year! — Lakisha K. Higgins, education and museum outreach coordinator
Workforce

Rural reflections

Specialization in one market—manufacturing, natural resources, or mining—has helped some rural economies thrive but posed challenges for others. Read the full story.

Outreach

Light at the end of the tunnel

Widely available COVID-19 vaccinations, continued fiscal and monetary policy support, and the resilience of US households and businesses are driving economic recovery, though some concerns remain. See our president’s recent speech.

Appalachian renaissance

Communities and regional partners in eastern Kentucky are joining forces—sharing resources, solutions, and stories of success—to promote a resilient economy. Find out more.
Workforce

Transferring skills to higher wages

Both jobseekers and workforce development professionals can use the Occupational Mobility Explorer tool to turn job skills into higher-paying positions. How will you use it?

Small Business

Who received PPP funding?

New research finds evidence that Paycheck Protection Program loans were less likely to make it to low- and moderate-income communities and Black, Hispanic, and American Indian or Alaska Native majority communities. Read it.

People and Households

What recent COVID-19 data reveal

COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths continue to fall in Ohio, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Kentucky, and the nation. See the updates.

A more efficient way to curb COVID-19

Cheaper and less precise COVID-19 tests that can be conducted multiple times could be more effective in stopping the spread of the disease. Read about the tests.

Updates on migration during the pandemic

People choosing a new place to live favored places like Cleveland and Pittsburgh over expensive coastal metros last year, but that is beginning to reverse in 2021.
Economic Inclusion

The future of postindustrial Midwest cities

Cleveland Fed experts recently discussed middle neighborhoods, businesses owned by people of color, and the opioid crisis with Johns Hopkins 21st Century Cities Initiative. Watch the webcast.

Question: How has the ability to work remotely during the pandemic affected where people live, and what are some upsides and downsides if the changes stick?

Stephan: With so many offices operating remotely during the pandemic, the normal flow of people moving into high-density areas to live near their workplaces for shorter commutes decreased. Some people moved out of these areas during the pandemic, but the bigger driver for population decline was fewer people moving in.
Read the entire Q&A, where policy economist Stephan Whitaker explains his research into the motivation behind the perceived urban exodus of 2020.

ON THE CALENDAR

Now through August
Watch Your Money Grow: Build Your Personal Finance Skills summer programming
(virtual)

Join in the fun

June 23–25
(beginning tomorrow!)
Policy Summit 2021: Pathways to Economic Resilience in Our Communities
(virtual event)
Read what’s on the minds of those involved

Register

June 30
Discussing Race and Inequality in the Classroom: COVID-19’s Impact on Economic Well-Being
(virtual event)

See list of speakers and register

July 12–16
Summer Research Coding Camp for rising high school juniors and seniors (virtual program)

Register by July 9

July 15
More ways to pay

The pandemic and other factors have millennials turning to a greater number of online payment options. See the latest.