

# The Place Puzzle

## Where you live matters to your career and your happiness

**Y**ou've got your diploma. You're ready to find your career and start your new life. Just one question: Where do you want to live?

For some people the answer is simple: "I want to live where my friends and family are," or "I want to live where the best opportunities are," or even "I've always wanted to live in New York City (or San Francisco or Seattle or Denver, etc.), and as soon as I can pack my bags I'm gone."

But for many others, the answer is something like, "all of the above" and deciding where to live feels like a daunting task.

By Laura Lyjak

### The case for putting place first

The three biggest decisions most people make in their lives are: 1. What they want to do for a career, 2. Who they want for a life partner, and 3. Where they want to live.

And place just might be the most important decision of the three because it has such a huge influence on the other two, says Richard

Florida, author of *Who's Your City* a book that explores the importance of place to career success and happiness.

A survey of Americans under 28 years old conducted by Next Generation Consulting showed three out of four think it's more important to find a great place to live than it is to find a good job.

What exactly is it that makes a place appealing? Not everyone agrees on the details, but there are some common themes. Molly Foley of Next Generation says that young people are looking for walkable cities with vitality and plenty of after-hours activities.

"They don't want to be stuck in traffic. They want to be able to get to restaurants, shops and clubs on foot or by bike," she says. Cities with vitality are those that value green space, protect the natural environment and make it easy to live

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healthy by allowing easy access to fresh food at farmers' markets or developing bike paths or providing easy recycling programs.

"They're also looking for communities where they can afford to buy a home and afford to enjoy the culture," she adds. "Unfortunately many of the highly rated cool communities are also expensive."

### The case for putting your career first

In some cases, your career success demands that you live in a particular place. Actors inevitably have to make the move to Los Angeles or New York. Software developers are simply going to find more opportunities and better pay in Silicon Valley.

Yet not as many people move for their career as you'd think. Less than a third of the people making long distance moves said it was work-related in a survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2000. But those with college degrees and those with higher incomes are more likely to move because of a job.

When does it make sense to pack up and seek your fortune elsewhere? "There are real tradeoffs to be made," acknowledges Florida.

"Many people who move for their careers will give up the joy of being near family and lifelong friends. Those of us who choose to stay close to family and friends may give up economic opportunity.

"The thing to remember when it comes to place, like most important things in life, we can't have it all," he adds.

### The case for putting family first

There's also real value in staying close to friends and family – perhaps the equivalent of \$133,000 a year in income according to a 2007 University of London study. And certain kinds of jobs are plentiful no matter where you live such as those in healthcare, skilled trades and technical careers. Community colleges train many people for these kinds of jobs.

Chris Belle Isle, director of the career center at Monroe Community College in Rochester, NY says that 95 percent of their graduates who find jobs, find them locally. Many community colleges cite similar statistics for their graduates.

In surveys conducted by Next Generation Foley notes a "boomerang" trend among people in their late twenties and early thirties, once they begin to marry and raise children. After heading out for the cool cities in their early twenties, "They'll return to the regions where they grew up," she says "but they define region broadly, like a three to four hour drive from family."

The trick to keeping skilled and college-educated workers close to home is to create the kinds of cities people want to live in, says Florida. "Regions and communities who want to compete for talented workers and experience 'brain-gain' will have to present a place that has all the features of a complete, authentic community." **CF**



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