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## Find your dream town, then a job

More people are choosing where they want to live first, then trying to get hired there. But how do you make it work?

By **Anne Fisher**, FORTUNE senior writer

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(Fortune) -- Not so long ago, most career-minded professionals looked for the right job - or any job - and took for granted that they might have to move somewhere less than ideal if their employer asked them to. That's changing fast.

In fact, two-thirds of Americans ages 25 through 34 say they're deciding first where they want to put down roots, and then looking for a job in that place, according to a new study by Yankelovich, a marketing firm, and CEOs for Cities, a national network of urban leaders.

Why the change? For one thing, women care somewhat more than men do about quality-of-life issues, the study says, and they make up a greater proportion of the workforce now than in previous decades. Meanwhile, advances in technology give knowledge-workers more flexibility in choosing where to live and, with a decline in loyalty to any particular employer, people are more willing to bail on a job if they don't like where it's located.

The main attributes these footloose employees seek in a place to live are cleanliness, access to excellent schools, parks and green space, and affordable housing.

"Lifestyle attributes are also important to this demographic," the study notes. "They prefer places where they can connect with others and have meaningful social interactions, [and] that are interesting and socially diverse."

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But is it really practical to select your dream town and then hope the right job comes along? Sometimes, yes. Consider, for instance, the career trajectory of Matthew Pease who currently lives in San Francisco, and took two demotions to get there. After relocating to San Francisco, though, he moved up the ladder again, and is now a regional vice president at [Microsoft](#) ([Charts](#)), in charge of about \$800 million in annual sales west of the Mississippi.

"My wife is third-generation Bay Area, and the lifestyle here is so great," he says. "We just knew we wanted to live here, even though I had to take some steps down to do it."

When Pease was still in New York, he had a senior management job at [AT&T](#) ([Charts](#)) working with C-level executives. His next job: San Francisco district manager at Sequent Computer Systems.

"The title was a demotion for me, and so was going from a \$60 billion, household-name company to an obscure, \$600 million one."

No matter. After a couple of promotions at Sequent, he caught the eye of somebody at Microsoft who hired him as general manager for northern California - again a step down from the title he already held at that point. Now, Pease is at Microsoft's "partner" level, making him one of 500 managers among the company's 60,000 employees, and he has no regrets.

"If you work like a dog and perform well, you will move up. It doesn't have to be a straight path upward," he says. "And you don't have to sacrifice a nice life to do it."

He and his family love San Francisco for its museums, theatres, restaurants, and cultural diversity - "and we do a lot outdoors, like hiking in the hills. The move was absolutely the right thing to do, but I think often people are afraid of change."

If you're itching to pull up stakes, there are ways to make it easier to find a good job in a new city. Local Chambers of Commerce offer a wealth of information about employers, so get in touch with them. A



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subscription to the local newspaper in your target city is a smart idea, too - not just for the help-wanted ads but also to give you a feel for the community, who's who, and what's going on there. You might also take a look at web sites like Craigslist that post job ads (as well as real estate listings and lots of other information) for particular cities.

Alas, employers often prefer to hire people who are already settled nearby, so if you have friends or relatives in the area where you want to move, ask if they'll help out by letting prospective employers contact you via their addresses and phone numbers. If and when you do make your move, remember to save receipts for everything: An employer may not be willing to pay relocation expenses, but these may be tax-deductible.

It's worth bearing in mind that your paycheck will stretch farther in some cities than in others, partly because state and local withholding taxes vary widely. Someone earning the average American salary of \$39,795, for instance, will take home \$1,317.33 every two weeks in Houston, but only \$1,196.74 in New York City - and that doesn't take into account other factors like the cost of living. To compare what your current gross pay would be worth after taxes if you earned the same amount in a different town, go to [www.paycheckcity.com](http://www.paycheckcity.com). Interesting! And to see how far your paycheck will go in another city, see our [cost-of-living calculator](#) here.

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