

# Steps for a Successful Career in IT after being Laid off at 60

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You have a PhD in Information Technology related field, had a 30 year career in the Tech Industry with a 200K+ salary. Now you are laid off at 60 – what do you do? Here are some suggestions

**Consulting:** You have worked for 30 years and therefore you should have at least a 2 year severance package. You have many options. The first option that would likely come to your mind is start your own consultancy. This is great provided you have a steady contract that will keep you going for about 50% of what you earned for a couple of years. If you left your former company in good terms perhaps you can negotiate a contract from them. You will also have to join various social media groups, use the contacts you have developed over the years, perhaps hire a PR agency, get advice from job consultants and build your practice. This is hard in a tough world, but if you have about 5 years to spend time on this you could succeed big here. Types of services may include design and development of software systems, software engineering advise and serving as an expert witness on patent infringement cases.

**Contract Development/Programming Jobs:** This is related to consulting, but you take long term contracts with companies and work on-site. There is a great demand for skilled developers. Some companies don't want to hire developers for permanent positions due to all the benefits they have to pay. Therefore, they hire skilled developers on both short and long-term contracts and pay them quite well. Such skilled developers can earn well over 200K per year. But then you have to be responsible for health care and put money away for retirement.

**Academic Research:** Third option is academia. At this age it is unlikely you will get tenure, but you can get a research faculty position at a university where you can contribute to the research utilizing the diverse industrial experience you have gained over the years. Make yourself valuable to the university so that the head of the department sees you as the go to person when it comes to industrial research. Get involved in interdisciplinary research and bring together researchers from multiple schools and help put together large research proposals.

**Senior Lecturer Positions:** Computer Science departments desperately need people to teach as enrollments are increasing at an extremely rapid pace. If your kids have graduated and have no mortgage and financial pressures or not there, this senior lecturer position is a very nice stress free

option especially if you like teaching. The drawback is that the salaries are around 60K while as tenured full professor could get at least 150K for the 9 months. Furthermore the teaching load is high for senior lectures. However you have the opportunity to create courses tailored for industry or carry out outreach for high school kids. If you can become the go to person for organizing innovative courses and outreach then you could have a rewarding career for a very long time.

**IPA as a path to Academia:** Another way to join academia is to take an IPA and join the government. Either the NSF or DARPA or NIH may be ideal government agencies you can work for. You will learn the funding process and about writing research grants as well as develop numerous contacts in Washington. With these contacts, you may be attractive to some universities possibly with tenure. Please note that to get an IPA you need to first join academia or a non-profit. There are some non-profit organizations that you can join first and then do an IPA via these organizations.

**Government/FFRDC:** Another option is to join Government or a FFRDC. Several federal organizations are looking for experienced IT professionals. Your vast experience could be a boon to these organizations. Furthermore, there is very little age discrimination with the government, FFRDCs (and academia). This option could keep you gainfully employed for a very long time.

**Start-Up:** This is often a dream option but extremely tough. But here you have to be very careful in not duplicating what the company who laid you off is doing. You can use your expertise, join with your colleagues in similar positions, brainstorm and develop a unique product. Then together approach VCs and others who will fund your project.

**Same Industry/New Skills:** The fifth option is to send your resumes out and try for another position in the same industry. This is what you would be most comfortable doing, but it is tough as why should a company hire a 60 year old? You need to be upfront, explain why you got laid off, and state convincingly how you can improve the bottom line of the company. Try not to make it the same old thing. Be innovative. Perhaps get into a hot topic in computing – today it is cyber security and data analytics – and learn it well. Then show how you can apply these skills to the new company to improve profits.

**New Industry:** The final option is to get into a new industry. You already have a PhD in computer science/IT. If you have the funds, take some time off and get a dual major JD/MBA. You can specialize in intellectual property law. You may need to start with a less salary, but if you are saying a stellar IP lawyer, then the rewards could be great. However there are some risks getting into a new industry.

**Blessing in Disguise:** On a positive note a layoff at any age might be a good thing, especially if you have done the same thing over and over again for many years. This is a great time to evaluate your options and perhaps plan a new career direction that might propel you to great heights. You might have developed a niche skill over the years and therefore by using this expertise to help customers could result in a highly profitable practice. This is also the time to write a book that consolidates your vast experience and give speeches at industry events.

**Timing is everything** Having said all this, it would be ideal to change positions before getting laid off as its common knowledge that it's much tougher to find a new job when one does not have a current job. The question is when do you quit your current job?. Its best to quit while in glory rather than wait until things turn sour. However one is reluctant to leave while things are working great. If you read my career background, I have left a position when things were going very well for me and when I got very comfortable in that position. In addition I always read the tea leaves and kept an eye and ear open to the surroundings. I learnt a lifelong lesson while I was at Control Data Corporation. Back in Fall 1985, I was 30, received an award and great reviews, praised by my boss, and also was a key member of the CDCNET product release team. However sometime during the summer of 1985 some very senior people (likely in their 50s) were laid off, we were asked to take vacation during the Thanksgiving break and I believe also during the labor day week. I could hear rumblings about the company's profits, and more importantly I wanted to get back into research instead of pure development and found a great opportunity at Honeywell that December while still being regarded very highly at Control Data.

**Final Thoughts:** Back to the crux of the article, you are 60 and now laid off. However, don't lament that you should have seen it coming. You do have choices. Furthermore, whatever choices you may make, you have to keep positive, maintain your health – that means eating right, meditating, working out, sleeping 7-8 hours and drinking lots of water – because if you have your health nothing is impossible. I will end this article with what I tell my students - to excel in their jobs, keep the customers happy, be a team player, and learn something new on the job every day.