

What Tocqueville Would Think about Modern Job Jumping

Ever feel that Americans are increasingly on the go?

If so, those feelings were recently confirmed, at least in terms of profession. A study by LinkedIn last month [found that](#):

“The new normal is for Millennials to jump jobs four times in their first decade out of college. That’s nearly double the bouncing around the generation before them did.”

While many of us might think of this as a bad thing, a comment by Alexis de Tocqueville in his 1840 work [Democracy in America](#) seems to show that such a continual state of movement is a bit of an American tradition.

Tocqueville writes:

“In the United States a man builds a house in which to spend his old age, and he sells it before the roof is on; he plants a garden and lets it just as the trees are coming into bearing; he brings a field into tillage and leaves other men to gather the crops; he embraces a profession and gives it up; he settles in a place, which he soon afterwards leaves to carry his changeable longings elsewhere. If his private affairs leave him any leisure, he instantly plunges into the vortex of politics; and if at the end of a year of unremitting labor he finds he has a few days’ vacation, his eager curiosity whirls him over the vast extent of the United States, and he will travel fifteen hundred miles in a few days to shake off his happiness.”

But what Tocqueville believes causes this state of continual movement might take us by surprise:

“The equality of conditions leads by a still straighter road to several of the effects that I have here described. When all the privileges of birth and fortune are abolished, when all professions are accessible to all, and a man’s own energies may place him at the top of any one of them, an easy and unbounded career seems open to his ambition and he will readily persuade himself that he is born to no common destinies.”

Tocqueville’s observations should give us pause. Today’s society is quick to feel that conditions are increasingly unequal, as evidenced by louder and more frequent protests by people from all walks of life.

But if mobility in the job force and other areas are growing, and if increased mobility and ambition are signs of greater equality, could it be that our society does not have as big of an equality problem as we’ve been led to believe?