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## WHY IT'S A GOOD TIME TO LOOK FOR A JOB

*The number of unfilled jobs at U.S. employers rose to a record high in March*

By Eric Morath  
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There was essentially one job opening for every unemployed person in America in March – making this spring an excellent time to look for a job, especially in the service sector.

The number of unfilled jobs U.S. employers had at the end of March rose to a record high of 6.55 million, the Labor Department said Tuesday. There were just 6.59 million unemployed Americans that month, creating the narrowest gap between available jobs and those actively seeking work in nearly two decades of record keeping.

“If you’re employed and looking for a new opportunity, it’s a great time to look,” said Paul McDonald, senior executive director at staffing agency Robert Half. “If you’re unemployed, and you have skills that are current, this data bodes very well for your job search.”

The number of job openings increased by nearly 1 million from a year earlier in March. Meanwhile, the number of unemployed who were actively looking for a job fell by almost 600,000, reflecting steady hiring.

As a result, employers must be far less choosy than they were three or four years ago, when the unemployment rate was still relatively elevated, Mr. McDonald said. In April, the unemployment rate fell to 3.9 percent, the lowest rate since December 2000, the Labor Department said in a separate report last week.

“If candidates have 75 or 80 percent of the job description, but they’re a good fit culturally, employers will hire that person and find a way to train them for the hard skills they need,” he said.

The largest growth in job openings over the year came in the business services category. There were 193,000 more available positions in the broad field that includes accountants, software developers, temporary staffers and other office workers.

Openings in retail, a high-turnover field, rose by 140,000 – suggesting other industries might be pulling workers from that sector. The fast-growth health-care sector had 139,000 more opening in March from a year earlier.

Meanwhile, the number of available manufacturing jobs declined slightly from a year earlier, and growth in the mining and construction industries was relatively slower.

While employers in those fields say they are seeking workers with specialized skills, such as welders and machine programmers, those sectors represent a smaller share of the economy than they did in decades past. It’s a concern because factory, construction and mining jobs often offer good-paying careers to those with less than a college education.

So why can't all unemployed Americans be slotted into open jobs? Not all of them have the right skills, Mr. McDonald said. For example, he said employers hiring for office jobs frequently require proficiency in spreadsheet programs such as Microsoft Excel. He also said employers want to see strong writing and communications skills because less experienced employees are frequently asked to lead presentations.

Unemployed workers also might not want the open jobs. Almost 800,000 job openings in March were in accommodation and food service – mainly restaurant jobs – where the average hourly wage is less than \$15 an hour. And 723,000 openings were retail, where the pay is only slightly better.

Some Americans can't justify taking a low-wage job when they factor in costs such as child care and transportation, and may have to forgo certain government benefits.

Tuesday's report showed the rate at which Americans quit their jobs rose to 2.3 percent in March, matching the highest level since the recession began in 2007. That suggests Americans are growing more confident in the labor market, and may be quitting in order to look for better-paying work. It could be a precursor to stronger wage increases.