



Careers in the Railroad Industry

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THE TIME TO CHOOSE A CAREER IS AN exciting time. Your career will define many parts of your life for years to come. You owe it to yourself to give this decision the attention it deserves. Some careers are essential. They may not be glamorous or lead to fame and fortune, but the world would not be able to get along without them. Railroading is one of those careers. When many people think of railroading they think of old-fashioned steam locomotives, streamlined passenger trains from times gone by or maybe pages from a school history book. Railroads have played a role in the development of the United States, and are part of our common heritage and lore. They are not as visible as they used to be, with most long-distance passenger travel shifting to airplanes decades ago, and trucks handling a large proportion of cross-country hauling. The truth is railroads are as important as they ever were. Railroads are the least-expensive way to haul heavy loads over long distances on land. Trains use thousands of miles of dedicated right-of-way to travel long distances around the clock using only a handful of operators. In a typical day American railroads deliver more than five million tons of consumer and industrial goods to cities across the country, and play a vital role in the container shipping system that moves goods around the world. Railroads deliver about 70 percent of all the coal used in the United States. Looked at another way, railroads provide nearly 40 percent of the electricity used in the United States by carrying the coal necessary to generate it. It would be hard to name another industry more essential to the American economy. Perhaps ironically, employment in the railroad industry is expected to shrink in the coming decades. This has nothing to do with railroading's importance or even with demand for its services, but rather with its suitability for technological transformation. Many of the jobs once done by people, like switching and even engineering, are being taken over by computers that can do the job just as well for a lot less money. People will never be completely factored out of the railroading equation, however, and the jobs that remain are more challenging and rewarding than they have ever been. Take careful note of the information contained in this report. In it you will find sections on how to prepare for your career, from what kind of education and training you will need to how to get a little experience in railroading right now. You will also find sections on how much money you can expect to earn at various stages in your career, what you can do to move up the ladder, and even what you may like and dislike about the career. If you like what you read here, keep going! Be sure to check out the links on the last page of this report.

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