

Personal Finance

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Interesting six-figure jobs

A look at lucrative careers that let you roll the dice, defend against terror and write about drugs.

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By Jeanne Sahadi, CNN/Money senior writer

NEW YORK (CNN/Money) – Summer's over, work's heating up and so are your fantasies of getting paid more.

Of course, since you're dreaming, why limit yourself just to a bigger paycheck? Why not dream about a job that captures your imagination?

This week we continue our ongoing series on interesting six-figure jobs with a look at the responsibilities and earning potential of casino general managers, corporate chief security officers, and medical writers in the pharmaceutical industry.

(For a look at other interesting jobs in this series, see the box inset below.)

Casino general manager

Warning: Working as the general manager of a casino probably will *not* make you as sexy as the characters on the NBC show "Las Vegas." But take heart. It may leave you feeling pretty hot financially.

Of course, it helps if you don't mind knowing whether it's day or night, the incessant ringing of slot machines is music to your ears and you have a good head for business not to mention customer service.

The general manager (GM) of a casino is responsible not only for the gambling portion of the operation but also for the hotel and restaurants associated with it, said Jim Bright, president of Bristol Associates, a recruiting firm that places managers in the gaming and hospitality industries.

GMs who excel at their jobs enjoy the customer-service aspect of the work, have a desire and ability to boost the bottom line and are good at managing people. "It's a people business, so there's potential for a lot of problems," Bright said.

High turnover is one of them. The demand for casino employees is strong, so a GM has to work hard to retain the best workers.

Since casinos operate around the clock, a GM's job is hardly 9-to-5. Sixty-hour weeks aren't unusual, nor is working Friday and Saturday nights as well as holidays, Bright said.

Many GMs have a college degree – it might be a bachelor's in hospitality, hotel management, accounting or finance. And while a graduate degree is not required, MBAs are becoming more common.

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The path to becoming a GM can be through the operations, finance or hospitality side of the business, Bright said. A college grad who starts his or her career as a management trainee in the industry might take 10 to 15 years before snagging a GM post.

A GM typically pulls in between \$200,000 and \$400,000 a year, Bright said, but on the way up the six-figure barrier can be broken as soon as you achieve the title of director or vice president in the operations, hospitality and finance sides of the business.

Chief security officer

Predict, prevent and protect. If this string of words appeals to you on a primal basis rather than just an alliterative one, you may have something in common with those who aspire to become chief security officer (CSO) of a corporation.

You may think being CSO is all about ensuring the safety of employees and protecting a company's physical assets. It is, but that's not the whole picture. CSOs also play a key business role as well.

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They must be able to analyze the credibility of widely diverse threats in a post-9/11 world and help top executives and the company's board make hard-core business decisions (such as whether to temporarily close down a plant) in the face of those threats, said Pete Metzger, partner in charge of the global security practice for executive recruiting firm Heidrick & Struggles.

Critical to that responsibility is having a current and extensive list of contacts at both law enforcement and intelligence agencies at the federal, state and local levels, said Metzger, a former Marine and CIA agent.

In addition to being a private adviser to the CEO and board members, a CSO serves as a senior analyst of company operations, coordinates all local security operations at company sites around the world, and communicates with employees to ensure that they worry less about threats to the company than about the company's business.

"The level of sophistication of these positions is changing geometrically," Metzger said.

The path to a CSO position is often through jobs held for eight-plus years in the military, in law enforcement, in the Secret Service, or in intelligence.

Having a bachelor's degree is typical but having a graduate degree is not, Metzger said. "Experience is the big thing."

The stress of the job – being a company's first line of defense – is also what makes the job exciting, he noted.

Metzger estimates that about a third of CSOs make six-figure salaries. CSOs at Fortune 500 companies might make between \$400,000 and \$750,000.

But they're not the only six-figure security personnel. A security director for a company's offices in a given region might also pull in a low six-figure salary, he said.

Medical writer

If you can say words like "pharmacokinetics" 10 times fast and use them meaningfully in a sentence, you may have some of what it takes to be a medical writer in the pharmaceutical industry.

Medical writers -- unlike most of us -- have both an understanding of science and the ability to write about it, bringing clarity to

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complex topics.

Meticulous attention to detail and an ability to analyze both descriptive and numeric data also are musts, said Art Gertel, a past president of the American Medical Writers Association and vice president of Clinical Services, Regulatory and Medical Writing.

So, too, is the stamina to work very long hours under tight deadlines.

Here's why: A key task is to write study reports, a formalized report submitted to regulatory agencies -- for example, the Food and Drug Administration -- so that regulators can review a new product such as a drug or medical device that the pharmaceutical company wishes to market.

The report is an analysis and interpretation of the data results from clinical trials and often is written in partnership with the physicians and statisticians working on the project.

Medical writers also might work on print ads for a pharmaceutical product, prepare articles for peer-review medical journals or write copy for "poster sessions" at medical meetings -- displays in exhibit halls that present the results of a clinical research project.

Gertel estimates that about 80 percent of medical writers who write regulatory copy have at least a master's degree in one of the life sciences. Of those, he estimates about 30 percent have a Ph.D. or a doctorate in pharmacy.

Most, however, never said, "I want to grow up and be a medical writer," Gertel said. Instead, many started out as "bench scientists" -- working in a lab for long hours and relatively low pay.

Recently, however, medical writing has begun to be recognized as a career track unto itself. And some schools even offer a master's degree in the field.

Medical writers in the pharmaceutical industry may start out making \$75,000 a year, but can top \$100,000 after three or four years, Gertel said. Once you reach the managerial level, you might make \$120,000 or more.

The population of medical writers who can write regulatory copy is small but that helps them command high pay. Said Gertel: "Medical writers are like gold right now." ■

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