

# My career

## Manager



**Michael W. Horrigan**

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### BLS fast facts: Managers, all other

- May 2011 wage and salary employment: 343,560
- 2010-20 projection: 8 percent growth (slower than average)
- May 2011 median annual wage: \$99,540
- Typical education and training: High school diploma or equivalent and 1 to 5 years of work experience in a related occupation
- May 2011 top employing industries: Federal executive branch; management of companies and enterprises; local government; state government; colleges, universities, and professional schools

**F**or Mike Horrigan, teaching has always been at the heart of what he likes doing best. And this passion has helped to shape his career.

Mike's first job after earning his Ph.D. was teaching economics at Williams College. While on sabbatical from that job, he spent a year at the U.S. Department of Labor and led several research seminars at BLS. Mike then applied for—and accepted—a position as a BLS research economist, marking the start of a 26-year career.

About every 3 years, Mike has changed jobs at BLS. Each job that he's held has taught him something new—and these lessons have helped him move up to the top levels of management. As a manager, Mike applies his love of teaching in diverse ways. He directs employees in BLS programs, for example, and gives presentations to the public about BLS data.

Mike recently received a Presidential Rank Award, one of the most prestigious honors given to managers in the federal government.

### What do you do?

I manage four survey programs: the Consumer Price Index, the Producer Price Index, the International Price Index, and the Consumer Expenditures Survey.

I don't directly run any of those programs. My role is to think corporately in terms of planning, budgeting, and the efficient use of resources. And I'm often involved in providing direction for any major projects, like the redesign of the Consumer Expenditures Survey.

Another significant aspect of the job is to be the face of BLS for the price programs. I am invited to give talks and represent our programs in various public forums. I also help to plan the direction for the entire BLS on issues like human resources or IT infrastructure.

### Which early experiences helped to shape your career?

When I was in 8th grade, I got a job that was almost ideal. I was a camp counselor helper in the morning, and in the afternoon I got to

teach my own swimming classes. I absolutely fell in love with teaching. I worked at the camp every summer throughout high school. So by the time I got out of high school, I knew I wanted to teach in one way or another.

### **Describe your educational background.**

I was a math major, but I took as many economics classes as possible. The thing I liked about economics was that it blended theory with real-world applications. And it turns out that math included a really useful set of skills to have for economics.

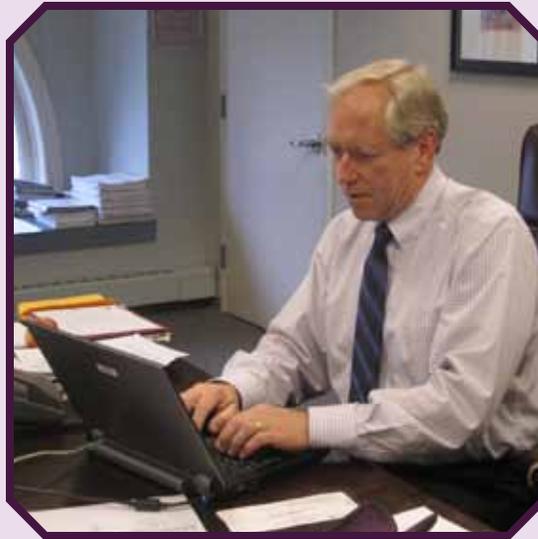
In graduate school, I was a teaching assistant, and they paid you to teach—which to me was the most wonderful thing in the world. That’s how I paid for school. My doctoral thesis was on the duration of unemployment, and I used BLS data. So because of that, I went down the route of becoming a labor economist.

### **To what do you attribute your success at BLS?**

I’ve been really lucky, but I’ve also taken advantage of opportunities as they’ve come up.

For example, when I was asked to help with a Department of Labor task force in 1988, I jumped at it. Similarly, in 1990, I was asked to work as a labor economist at the Council of Economic Advisers. When I came back to BLS in 1991, I was given my first opportunity to manage a program: the BLS survey of employer-provided training. It was a great experience. There were four of us working with other staff we recruited from around BLS. We did everything from designing the survey to selecting the sample, running estimates, and disseminating the results.

At my next job, running the National Longitudinal Survey, it was my first foray into how to handle significant budget issues. That was when I went from being a technical



supervisor to thinking like a broad-based manager.

### **Any surprises along the way?**

When I first started, I didn’t know I would enjoy managing as much as I do now—managing people and providing direction and vision for the programs.

And it’s funny, because I still teach. Right now I’m teaching a course at the Georgetown University Public Policy Institute. Teaching will always be a part of what I do.

### **What’s your best advice?**

Take advantage of opportunities when they are presented. To have a career path like mine, where you have various jobs, it’s not something you can plan for.

For managers, I would advise: Don’t micromanage. Trust your people. If people feel like you trust their work, they respond to that. And they do a better job at it as a result.

And if you have this, you are truly lucky: I have a lot of fun in my work. I love working with the people I work with, and I laugh a lot. This is a fun job. It’s also a serious job and there are serious issues, but you have to know how to balance it.



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*Michael Horrigan was interviewed by Elka Torpey, an economist in the Office of Occupational Statistics and Employment Projections, BLS. She can be reached at [torpey.elka@bls.gov](mailto:torpey.elka@bls.gov).*