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Katie Charland quit her job at a parenting magazine in Phoenix to join Gangplank Phoenix, a nonprofit that offers educational programs for children.

More employees quit as economy improves

Resignation exceeding layoffs, suggesting better job market

By Christopher Leonard and Christopher S. Rugaber
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One sign of better economic times is when more people start finding jobs. Another is when they feel confident enough to quit them.

More people quit their jobs in the past three months than were laid off — a sharp reversal after 15 straight months in which layoffs exceeded voluntary departures. The trend suggests a thawing job market.

Some are leaving for new jobs. Others have no firm offers. But their newfound confidence is evidence of more hiring.

"There is a century's worth of evidence that bears out this view that quits rise and layoffs fall as the job market improves," said Steven Davis, an economist at the University of Chicago.

Still, the number of people quitting their jobs is nowhere near what it was before the recession.

The number of people quitting rose in April to nearly 2 million, up 12 percent this year and the most in more than a year. That compares with 1.75 million people who were laid off in April, the fewest since January 2007.

During the depths of the recession, workers were hesitant to quit — and not only because jobs were scarce. Even if they found a new job, some feared that accepting it would leave them vulnerable to a layoff.

David Adams, vice president of training at Adecco, said when the staffing agency tried to recruit workers, it ran into the same obstacle: Few workers felt like betting on a new job that might soon disappear.

Not so much any more. Adecco is seeing more employed workers seeking interviews, rather than laid off workers searching for a lifeline.