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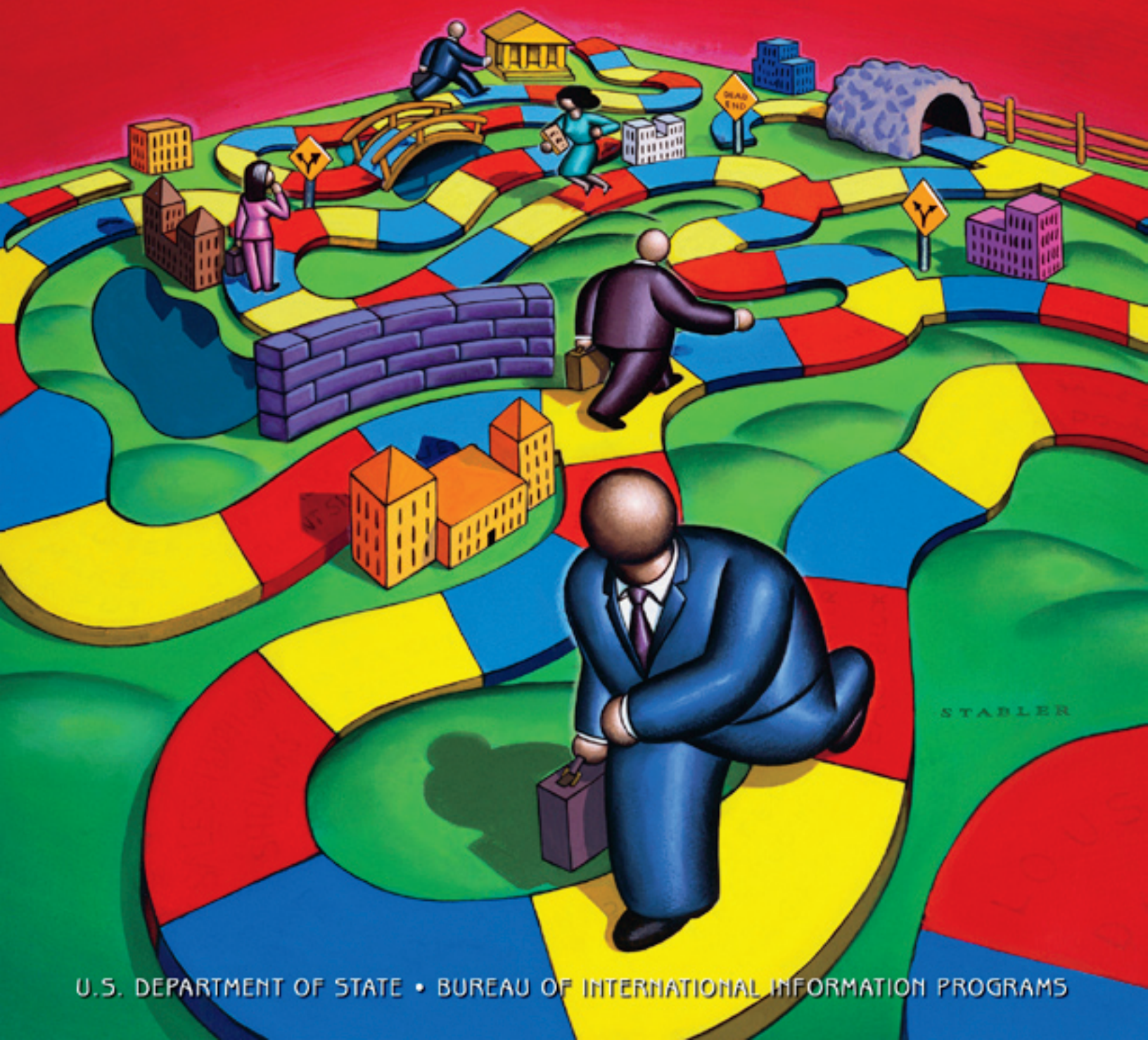
CHOOSING A CAREER



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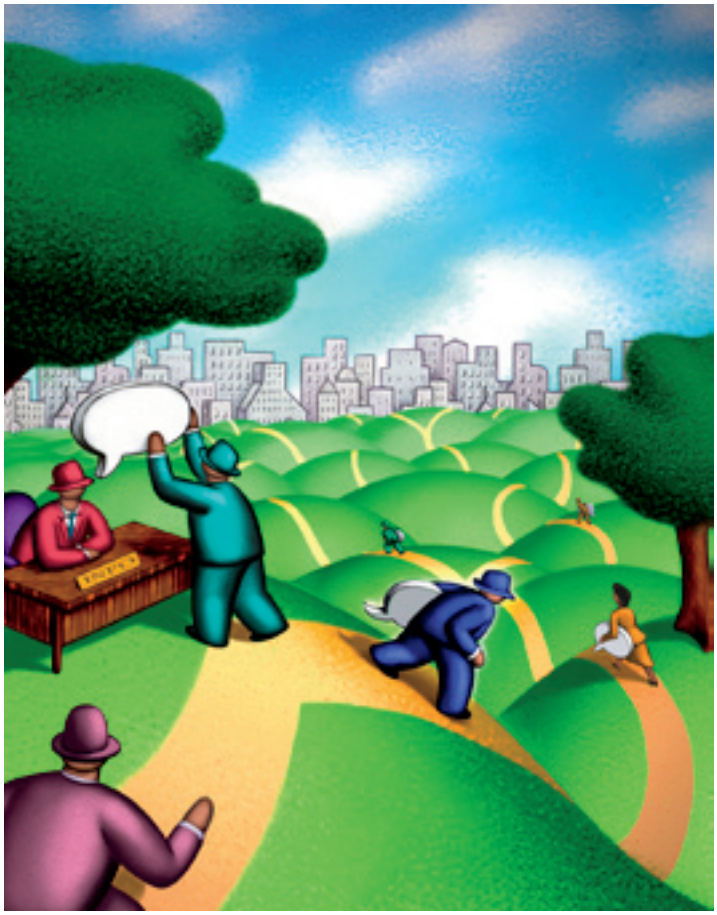
About This Issue

Go for your life, some American kids are saying today. "Go your own way" and "Do your own thing" are the slogans some songwriters have left us. "Do what you want to do."

Different cultures and different generations have chanted a lot of mottoes about that stage of life when a person is becoming an adult and making hard choices about the future.

Mottoes like these make it sound like becoming a stand-up adult is a totally excellent adventure. But — reality-check — most young people are also worried about finding some kind of interesting work that also brings them the income to make a comfortable life.



Barton Stabler/Photodisc/Getty Images

Whether you call it choosing a career, making a living, or just getting a job, everybody would like to find a way to be amped-up about their work and still pay the bills. What's the secret? No magic words, no mysterious spells will do it for you, but we've managed to pin down some advice that might give you some direction.

On the pages that follow, we've asked a variety of Americans to tell how they found a path to a career that is right for them and what they learned along the way. They tell the good part, but they don't leave out the bad moves and wrong turns. You'll meet people who found their calling while doing very hard work for very little pay. Several will tell you how their families influenced their choices. Others describe years spent going in one direction, only to learn they really had to follow a different path.

This issue also contains some advice from experts who found their life's work in helping other people find the right careers. They might help you figure out what skills, credentials, and passions you bring to the search for a career.

These stories are all different, but really, they are all about the same thing: self-determination, empowerment, dreaming your own dream, and finding a way to get there.

—The Editors

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What You Offer the World

Richard N. Bolles

Life planning expert Richard N. Bolles, author of What Color Is Your Parachute?*, offers some advice on how to identify the skills you have that will lead you to the career you want.*

For years, I've taught workshops attended by people from around the world — poor, rich, young, old, schooled, and unschooled. I've discovered that everyone — and I mean *everyone* — has at least 500 skills. The questions are: Which kind, and what are they?

We are all born gifted; we are all born "skilled," even those with severe disabilities. Watch a baby learn, digest, and put information to use. The skills every child has are astounding!

Look at your skills, examine them, and recognize they are talents you offer the world.

Basically there are three kinds of skills, and it is useful to think of them in three categories: verbs, nouns, and adjectives.

Some of your skills are verbs, things you do.

Like: healing, sewing, constructing, driving, communicating, persuading, motivating, negotiating, calculating, organizing, planning, memorizing, researching, synthesizing, etc. These are your Transferable or Functional Skills. They are also called talents, gifts, and "natural skills."

They are strengths you have, often from birth. Some people, for example, are born knowing how to negotiate; but if you weren't, you often can learn how to do it as you grow. So, some of these skills are "acquired." You rarely ever lose these skills.

They are called your Transferable Skills because they can be transferred from one occupation to another and used in a variety of fields, no matter how often you change careers.

These skills are things you are good at doing in one of three universes: people, things, or data/information/ideas. Most of us lean toward preferring work that is primarily with either people, things, or data. And why? Because that's where we use the skills we most love to use.

Some of your skills are nouns, subjects, and objects you understand well.

Like: computers, English, antiques, flowers, colors, fashion, Microsoft Word, music, farm equipment, data,

© AP Images/The Fresno Bee, Tomas Ovalle

Some research shows that people working in jobs in which they care for, teach, or protect others experience the greatest levels of job satisfaction. Individuals working in creative pursuits also report high levels of contentment in their work. A kindergarten teacher (above) in California teaches students to run on the grass, not the cement.

© AP Images/*Daily Messenger*/Jack Haley

Students in a vocational education program in upstate New York are getting some training in veterinary assistance skills.

© AP Images/Matt Houston

Simmie Knox is a Maryland artist, and the first African-American painter to be commissioned to do a presidential portrait.

graphics, Asia, Japanese, the stock market, etc.

These are called your Subject Skills or Knowledge Skills. They are subjects that you know something about and love to use in your work. They are often called "your expertises."

You have learned these, over the years, through apprenticeships (formal or informal), school, life experience, books, or from a mentor. Which ones do you absolutely love to use? This is the second set of skills you have to offer the world.

Adjectives or adverbs are the third kind of skills.

Like: accurate, adaptable, creative, dependable, flexible, methodical, persistent, punctual, responsible, self-reliant, tactful, courteous, kind, etc.

These are your Personal Trait Skills. Traits are the ways you manage yourself, the way you discipline. They give a style to your transferable skills. Often these are developed only through experience.

In everyday conversation, we speak of our traits as though they floated freely in the air: "I am dependable; I am creative; I am punctual." But in reality, traits are always attached to your transferable skills, as adjectives or adverbs.

For example, if your favorite transferable skill is "researching," then your traits describe or modify how you do your "researching." Is it methodically, or creatively, or dependably?

These styles, these self-disciplines, are the third thing you have to offer to the world.

How you combine these three kinds of skills is what makes you unique.

It is important, then, that you figure out what kinds of jobs need the transferable skills, and the expertises, and the traits that you most like to use. After all, you were born because the world needs what you uniquely have to offer. ■

© AP Images//Matt Rourke

Tricia Borneman, right, works at a farmers' market in Philadelphia. She is among a new crop of farmers sprouting up around the country who are college educated and leave other careers to enter farming.

This article is adapted from http://www.jobhuntersbible.com, *the official site of Bolles's book* What Color Is Your Parachute? *Reprinted with permission.*

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Culture Affects Career and Life Planning

Richard N. Bolles

© AP Images/Bebeto Matthews

This job fair was sponsored by the City University of New York to bring graduating students, alumni, and recruiting employers together.

How young people make career choices varies widely in different countries. A career expert surveys these various standards exclusively for eJournal USA.

Richard N. Bolles is the author of What Color Is Your Parachute?*, a guide to job hunting and career choice that has been reprinted in 10 editions over the last 30 years and translated into more than 20 languages.*

Let's start with a story.

Imagine, if you will, a beautiful valley, filled with every kind of fruit tree. You are told that you may choose any tree in that valley, and its fruit will be yours. To aid you in your choice, a little table is set up at the entrance to the valley, where you may taste the various fruits to see which one you most prefer. When your tasting is finished, you point to one fruit you've decided is your favorite. They lead you down the valley until you are looking at this beautiful tree. "That is your tree," they tell you.

You should be thrilled, but instead your heart falls because the lowest-hanging fruit is at least 20 feet (seven meters) above the ground. Though in theory you may have the fruit you chose, in fact you cannot reach it.

You resign yourself to the frustration that your favorite fruit is forever beyond your reach, or you devise some plan for attaining it.

First you try to knock down some of the fruit by throwing rocks at the lowest branches of the tree. When that approach is not successful, you try another. You get several of your friends together, and they form a living pyramid, standing on each other's shoulders, then hauling you up, like an acrobat, to the very top of this human pyramid where you will be able to reach the fruit. But the friends are unsteady, and the pyramid beneath you soon begins to crumble. You come up with one last idea. You take out a book from the library, and with the advice and practical help of those same friends, you learn to build a 30-foot (nine-meter) wooden or bamboo ladder. Once built, it can be carried from one spot to another beneath the tree, and you can pick the lovely fruit you so desire.

Once you have the fruit in hand, you exit the valley at the other end, where there is an inspector to ascertain if the fruit is really yours before you are allowed to keep it.

You may have guessed that this is a parable or allegory, designed to help us picture the approach to career pursuit in the United States, with its four stages:

The choice of a career that pleases you. This is represented by the fruit tasting at the entrance to the valley.

The job hunt. This is represented by the fact that you cannot reach that fruit at first. Here is our principal truth in this article: Career choice without job-hunting skills is "fruitless." They are two parts of one indivisible whole. Without job-hunting skills, career choice is only a dream. Without a career choice, job hunting is no more than drifting. Drifting or dreaming: These are the consequences of mastering only one side of the career hunt as it is pursued in the United States.

© AP Images/Ben Margot

Richard N. Bolles, seen here in California, is the author of *What Color Is Your Parachute?*, the bestselling career-advice book of all time, according to publisher Ten Speed Press.

Keeping these caveats in mind, let us catalog what variations there are around the world. Let us look at the rainbows:

Career choice. Around the world, some people will just "fall into" a career by accident or happenstance, hence "career choice" is not something highly valued or expected; in such cultures, young people do not know what they want, nor do they have the perspective to even frame the question to themselves. While at the other end of our rainbow, in some countries career choice is certainly expected, but the whole family chooses what career you will be pointed toward. It is a communal choice, not an individual one — based on what will gain the greatest prestige, or "face," for the family as a whole. (In many cultures, "face" refers to a family or individual's reputation or standing in society.) It is worth noting that societies that do not use the vocabulary of "face" often base their career-choice system upon the concept nonetheless: Does a certain career automatically earn respect and confer admirable social standing upon the individual or family? Typically, engineer, doctor, and professor are at the top, while entrepreneur and politician are at the bottom. Individual choice is constrained by such considerations.

The job hunt. In some cultures, or at least amidst certain classes, there is little choice as to how you go about your job hunt. The method of the job hunt is prescribed and even ritualistic: "There is an order to things; this is the way it's done." In Northern Ireland, for example, the law requires that for certain state jobs every candidate has to be asked exactly the same questions. In other countries, the ritual may not have all the status of law but may be a heavily prescribed expectation. In some Latin or South American countries, for example, you are expected to deliver to companies that are of interest a package, running up to 10 pages or more, in advance of an interview. This package should include a three- to five-page resume (sometimes longer), educational records, certifications, photocopies of diplomas, letters of recommendation from previous employers, etc. The point is to provide credibility — "I am who I say I am" — before companies even ask for such evidence. Some cultures (as in Europe) have an almost indestructible belief that the job-hunting system functions in a well-ordered, prescribed way — even when there is a ton of evidence that this simply is not true. Even much of the United States is not immune to this delusion.

The various methods of job hunting. These are represented by the rocks, the human pyramid, and the ladder. Favored job-hunting methods in the United States are the sending out of resumes (throwing rocks at the tree, hoping to shake some of the fruit to the ground); networking (building a human pyramid in order to reach the fruit); and/or empowerment, becoming a competent job hunter forever by using the present crisis to learn how to deal with this kind of crisis for the rest of your life. You'll achieve that by inventorying your skills, learning to provide evidence of those skills, and then identifying the needs of targeted employers (this is represented by the building of a permanent ladder).

Successfully passing the interview with a prospective employer. This is represented, in our parable, by the inspection station at the exit from the valley at the far end.

With this parable about the U.S. careers system as our background, let's see how the process of career choice and the job hunt (one indivisible topic) diverges from this model in other countries around the world. Keep in mind that in every country this process is like a rainbow. We may select or discuss a dominant *color* in that country, but the other colors are always present in one degree or another. Hence, claiming that any country has just one method of going about career choice or the job hunt is ridiculous; there are usually as many exceptions as there are "rules." We can speak only in terms of dominant assumptions, tendencies, or trends, and these frequently occur only among some social classes in that particular country.

The various methods of job hunting. At the other end of this job-hunting rainbow, in the United States and countries with similar latitude, you can use any method of job hunting that occurs to you. If you invent a new method tomorrow that nobody has ever heard of, more power to you. There are no limits, apart from avoiding weirdness and bad taste. In *What Color Is Your Parachute?*, I identify 16 different methods of job hunting, but the three most common methods are those alluded to in our allegory earlier: resumes, networking, and empowerment. Unlike the allegory, however, these are often not alternatives, but are all used simultaneously in pursuit of success in any particular case.

Successfully passing the interview with a prospective employer. The rainbow here is impressive. The outstanding difference, however, revolves around whether the interview and the job are perceived in terms of the group or perceived in terms of the individual. In the United States, we are accustomed to the emphasis being upon the individual. The individual is the subject of the hiring interview, at which time the individual must say what makes him or her outstanding, compared to other job hunters with similar backgrounds. The individual must describe and document the results he or she achieved in previous jobs or roles. The individual must, in the end, ask for the job and later decide which job offer to accept.

In many, many countries around the world, this is a totally foreign process, particularly in those cultures where the family is a dominant social force. In these countries, the emphasis is on the importance of the community, the group, and the team, both at work and in the interview.

For openers, the community may be present in the interview, with the entire family coming to the interview (in some Asian cultures or Maori). Their role is to volunteer things about you that you may have forgotten to mention or that humility may dictate you not say about yourself. As the process advances, the role of family members is to decide which position and firm you should accept, based on which offers the most "face" to the family.

The community is the subject of the interview. It is not the individual who accumulates achievements — only the group or the team. Indeed, in some cultures, in order for the team to function at its highest, employers may only consider hiring everyone from the same city or community to be sure they will work well together.

As job hunter, your role in the interview is to emphasize what you contributed to the team or group you worked with in the past. More than this — that is, trying to stand out from the other members of the group — is regarded as arrogance. In Japan, this prohibition is enshrined in the adage "hit the nail that stands above the rest, so they all are even"; while in Australia and New Zealand, this is referred to as "the tall poppy gets cut first." Ouch!

You are advised instead to speak of your assets only in terms of "added value," a term that almost every employer understands.

Now that we have seen how the process of career choice and the job hunt varies in countries around the world, I see four lessons for someone who is about to head down this road:

• Take inventory of yourself. Know yourself as well as you possibly can. (See exercises in *What Color Is Your Parachute?* or similar works.) Decide what transferable skills you have, particularly what skills you could contribute to a team or community of workers.

• Using the Internet, the phone book, or conversations with people who work in your field of interest, find out as much as you can about companies or organizations where you might like to work. If you know more about that company than other job seekers, you'll make a good impression when you get an interview. Companies love to be loved.

• Familiarize yourself with how the job hunt is typically done in the land where you are seeking work. Talk to several people who have found jobs there, and ask how they did it. Take notes.

• Go deeper. Ask people whom they know who *didn't* follow the typical path but found work they enjoyed doing anyway. Talk to them face-to-face, if you can, and ask how they did it. Take note of all the details so you can devise a "Plan B" in case the typical path in that country doesn't work for you.

What you want, more than any job, is hope for your future and in your life. And in job hunting, as in life, hope is born from always having alternate ways of pursuing your search for purpose and meaning on this earth. ■

Further information about job hunting is available at the author's Web site http://www.jobhuntersbible.com/

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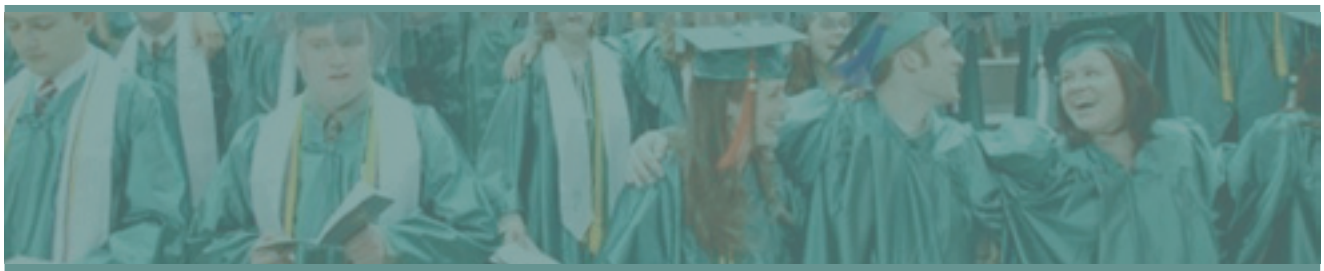


Congraduations, Dude

Corporate Executive Michael Dell: The Contest With Your Own Potential

© AP Images/Harry Cabluck

Michael Dell occasionally still works the phone line in the company's U.S. consumer department.

You have an abundance of opportunities before you — but don't spend so much time trying to choose the perfect opportunity, that you miss the right opportunity. Recognize that there will be failures, and acknowledge that there will be obstacles. But you will learn from your mistakes and the mistakes of others, for there is very little learning in success….

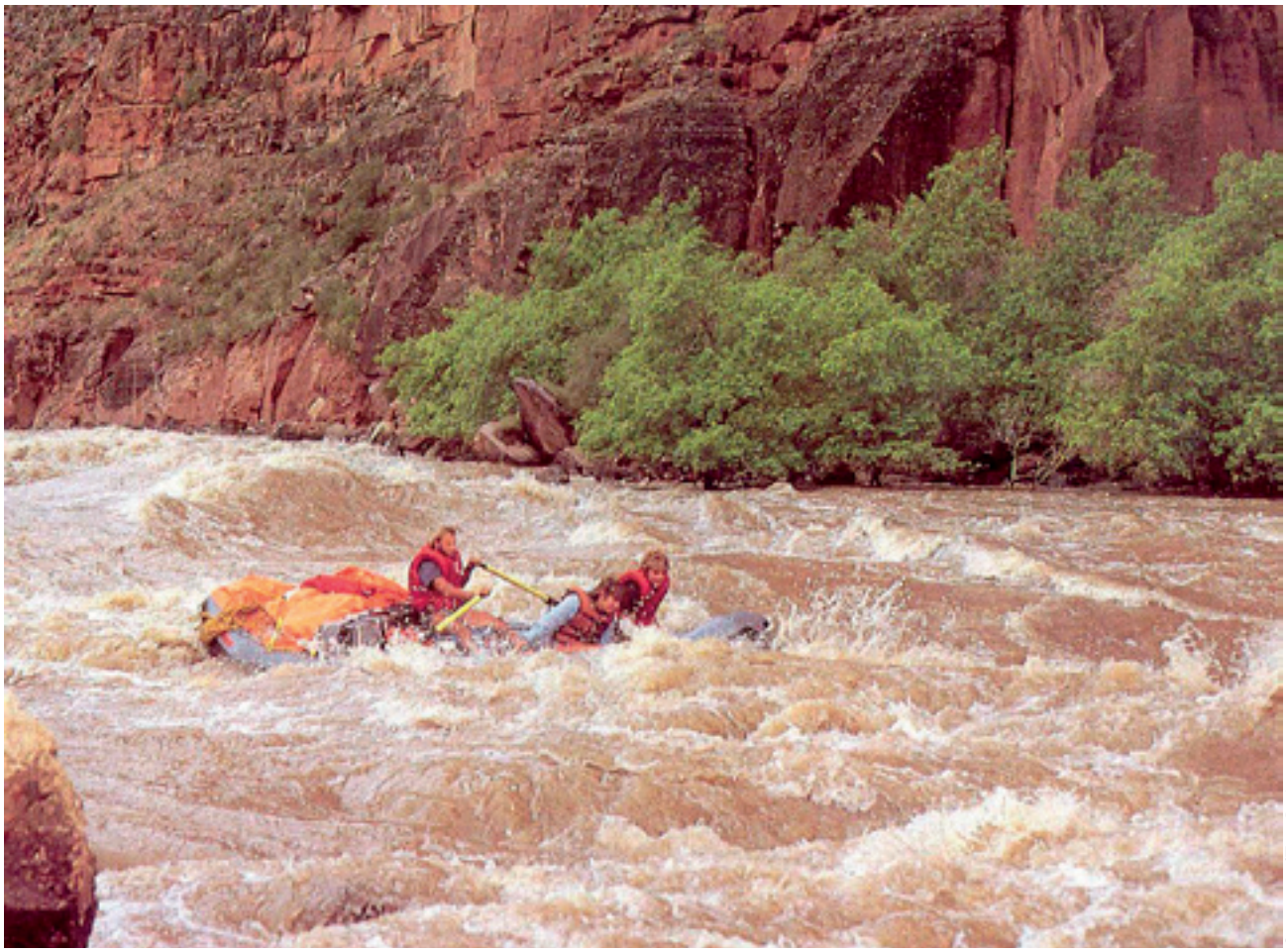
Many times along the way, you're going to ask why. Why am I on this path? What is it all about? You'll ask yourself those questions in 10 years and in 20 years as often as you're asking them now. Well … I have an answer for you. It's all about winning. That's right, winning.

But I'm not talking about the most points, or toys, or sales. I'm talking about winning in a contest with your own potential. I'm talking about believing in yourself enough to become the best accountant, engineer, or teacher you can possibly be. I'm talking about never measuring your success based on the success of others – because you just might set the bar too low.

Michael Dell is the chairman of the board of directors and chief executive officer of Dell Computer Corporation, the company he founded in 1984. In 1992, Mr. Dell became the youngest CEO ever to earn a ranking on the Fortune 500. He spoke to graduates at the University of Texas at Austin in 2003. (Excerpt used with permission.)

A River Runs to It

Jeff Rennicke



Courtesy of Tom Beck

The author is at the oars of this raft as it roars down the Yampa River in the state of Colorado.

An outdoors writer explains how rivers set him on a path to a profession.

Jeff Rennicke is an award-winning outdoors writer, who has lived a life of travel and adventure. His search for stories has taken him to the wildest places on five continents, travels he has chronicled in 10 books and more than 200 magazine articles in such publications as National Geographic Adventure, Backpacker, *and* Reader's Digest, *twice winning gold medals for excellence from the Society of American Travel Writers. He teaches writing and literature at Conserve School in Wisconsin and still loves to paddle rivers.*

I am a writer because of a river. It wasn't much, just a tired old stretch of an industrial waterway, but I could see it from my high school classroom. On days when the hands of the clock seemed glued in place and the pages of textbooks wouldn't turn, I'd sit for hours watching the river, dreaming. Here was Ernest Hemingway's Big Two-Hearted River where Nick Adams fished for a new start in life. Here was Mark Twain's Mississippi with Huck and Jim lying on their backs aboard a raft pointing out stars with their toes. This small stretch of river was, on some days, the only thing moving, the pathway of my dreams, my ticket to the world that lay around the bend. And then one day the teacher mentioned Carl Sandburg.

"I know now it takes many, many years to write a river," the poet wrote, "a twist of water asking a question." At that moment, staring out the window at the river, my very own "twist of water," I knew what I would do with my life. I would be a writer and I would begin by writing about rivers.

Being a writer is not the kind of career they tell you about at a job fair. It doesn't fit neatly into the check-off boxes of any "occupational aptitude survey" a guidance counselor might give you. With writing you make your own path, find your own way, a prospect that is both frightening and exhilarating.

In college while others were doing job interviews and internships, I was practicing an Eskimo roll in my kayak, paddling every chance I got, and reading, always reading — *River Notes* by Barry Lopez, John McPhee's *Coming into the Country, The River Why* by David James Duncan. I knew in my heart that there were stories told in rivers, questions in the twisted currents, if only I could find them.

Courtesy of Kim Schumacher

Author, adventurer, and teacher Jeff Rennicke.

With a bachelor of arts in English/Creative Writing in the bottom of my backpack, I took a job as a river guide after college and set off searching — the Colorado River in the Grand Canyon, Alaskan rivers with their banks stitched together in grizzly tracks, rivers with unpronounceable names and raging whitewater in China, South America, and Canada. I paddled them all, sat around the campfires, listened to the stories. Along the way, I learned about rivers, about time, and about language.

Wild rivers are more than just pathways of water from here to there. They are as much pathways into ourselves. There is no rushing a river. When you go there, you go at the pace of the water and that pace ties you into a flow that is older than life on this planet. Acceptance of that pace reminds us of other rhythms beyond the sounds of our own heartbeats, teaches us about the flow of an idea, the pace of a good story, the preciousness of time. I paid attention. I took it all in. And then I sat down to write.

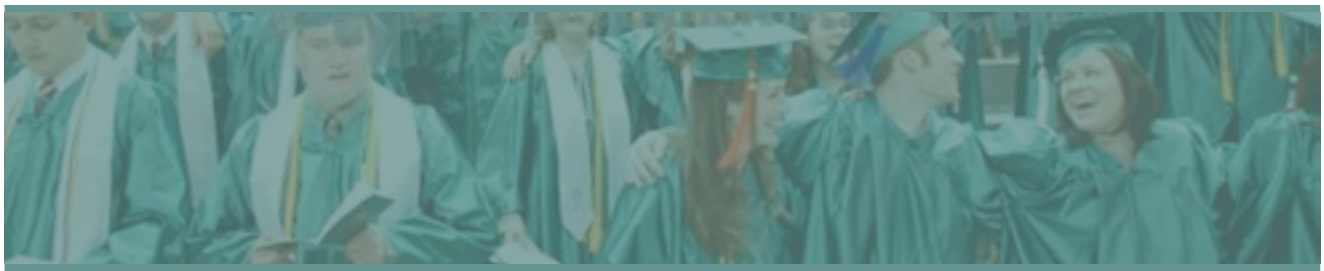
As much as running wild rivers, writing is an act of exploration. You set off on a blank page to explore the mountains and canyons and rapids of ideas. You stare down questions and keep yourself open to the echo of answers, however faint. You hone your skill with a pen instead of a paddle, lay bare your soul on paper, and send it in to a magazine editor.

And they say "no thanks." Or at least they do some of the time. But you try again – another magazine, another story. And then one day, they say "yes." A magazine comes out with your name in it, your story, something that started with an idea as indistinct as the swirl of a river current is now in a magazine, a story, your story, shared with the world.

Then you do it all over again, and again. Within two years, I was writing as much as paddling, the money I made as a guide supplementing the money I made as a writer. Magazines began to call. Assignments came that took me away from rivers to other wild places — hiking among the giant grizzlies of Kamchatka, hang gliding off the Outer Banks of North Carolina, trekking in Antarctica. Soon I was an editor at *Backpacker* magazine and contributing regularly to the publications of the National Geographic Society. Magazine articles became books. Somewhere along the line I stopped defining myself as a river runner/writer. I had become a writer and the river flows on in words.

There has never been a better time to be a nature writer. Books and magazine articles, the stories we tell, have always been one of the ways we find our way through the darkness of uncertainty, a way to address the great questions of our time. With global climate change, increasing extinction rates, and the host of environmental challenges we face, the questions of the human relationship to the environment and our place in the natural world will be among our most vital literary inquiries, the most important stories that we can tell. There are indeed questions in the layers of rock on a mountainside, in the swirls of grass in a meadow, and in the "twists of water" as a great poet once wrote. And there are answers too, in the rivers, in the mountains, and inside each one of us, if only we learn how to look. ■

The author's Web site is http://www.jeffrennicke.com



Congraduations, Dude

Corporate Executive Kenneth I. Chenault: Face History, Make History

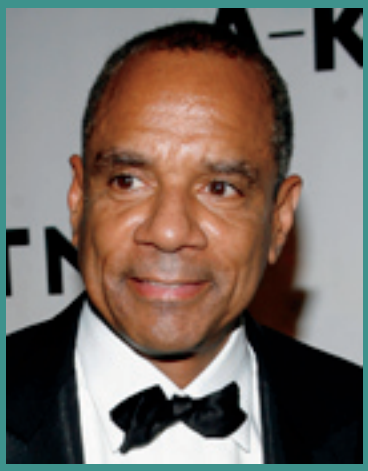
Whether you are heading off for further study or moving into the workforce, we need you. Our nation needs you. Our community needs you, both in the United States and the world at large. We need your energy, your intelligence and insights, your skills, your determination to take on the world, and your confidence to succeed.

Always remember your dual responsibility. Recognize that you can contribute to a company but also to the reconstruction of New Orleans and the Gulf region.

You can pursue profits and promotions, but you can also help a little girl in Panama pursue her potential. You can build a career and start a family, and you can help close the gaps of inequality that still exist for too many in the African-American community.

Face prejudice, and make progress. Face history, and make history. Recognize that dual responsibility and lead.

That is your indelible ancestral imperative.



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American Express CEO Kenneth Chenault at a 2007 event at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City.

Kenneth I. Chenault is chairman and chief executive officer of the American Express Company. A wide variety of civic, social service, and community organizations also have recognized his public service leadership. He delivered the 2008 commencement address at Howard University in Washington, D.C., among the nation's most highly respected historically black universities. (Excerpt used with permission.)

Chili, Hot Dogs, and the Family Legacy

Jeanne Holden

Courtesy of Tim Brown

Nizam Ali inspects his family's storefront on U Street in Washington, D.C. The Lincoln Theater, another Washington landmark, is in the background.

Ben's Chili Bowl is a small restaurant with a huge reputation in Washington, D.C., and beyond. A West Indian immigrant to the United States started the business more than 50 years ago, and his sons lead the business into its sixth decade.

Jeanne Holden is a freelance writer.

"It's about the people. It's always been about the people," says Nizam Ali, when asked why he went into his family's business, Ben's Chili Bowl. "It came down to helping my family and realizing how much our restaurant means to so many people."

Nizam, now 38 years old, didn't always want to run the landmark hot dog and chili shop his parents started 50 years ago in Washington, D.C. In fact, he was in his late 20s before he truly appreciated the significance of his parents' accomplishments.

Mahaboob Ben Ali, Nizam's father, came to the United States in 1945 from Trinidad, West Indies, where he was born. According to Nizam, Ben had the drive of the poor immigrant who must succeed. "Dad's people were business people," said Nizam. The United States was the land of opportunity. Ben Ali tried several careers, from the import-export business to dental school to waiting on tables.

On August 22, 1958, he opened a little hot dog and chili parlor in a vibrant section of the U.S. capital then known as "Black Broadway" because top African-American performers played clubs in the area. Ben started the restaurant with the help of Virginia Rollins, the

woman who would become his wife. Virginia worked on U Street at the Industrial Bank of Washington, one of the oldest and largest African-American-owned banking institutions in the United States.

Virginia had grown up on a farm in Chance, Virginia, about 100 miles southeast of Washington, D.C. "Mom's strong work ethic and warm, welcoming ways — her so-called Southern hospitality — complemented Dad's business sense," said Nizam. They were in love, but getting married was complicated. Ben Ali is of South Asian descent and Virginia Rollins is African American. At the time, interracial marriages were illegal in certain states. After several attempts, Ben Ali and Virginia Rollins were married in a civil ceremony in a Washington, D.C., courthouse — two months after the opening of Ben's Chili Bowl.

A Neighborhood Restaurant

The Alis used $5,000 to open a neighborhood restaurant known for simple, good food and a friendly staff. The U Street Corridor was a center of the black community with businesses, shops, and restaurants. Ben's Chili Bowl was popular and attracted a mix of African-American artists, professionals, and ordinary folks. In the early years, well-known jazz performers such as Duke Ellington and Bessie Smith were regular customers. Later, Bill Cosby, a famous comedian, humanitarian, and philanthropist, liked to hang out at Ben's and brought his future wife, Camille, there while they were dating.

Ben's Chili Bowl endured in good times and difficult ones. When the civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in 1968, riots broke out in many cities. In Washington, D.C., most businesses in the U Street Corridor closed down, but Ben's remained open. In the 1980s, subway expansion tore up U Street, but Ben's remained open throughout years of construction.

His parents' philosophy sustained the restaurant, Nizam said. "Basically, it consisted of 'treat everybody well, your friends, your employees, and your customers.' If you treat your community well, they will be there for you."

Career Decisions

Nizam, the youngest of the Alis' three sons, was born in 1970 and grew up in the restaurant. "As soon as I could reach the tables, I started wiping them off," he recalled. Nizam helped out after school and in the summer, but the restaurant wasn't all-consuming. He also took part in camps and other activities. "I never minded having a family that owned a restaurant," he said. "It was a very cool place to bring your friends."

Nizam's oldest brother, Haidar, helped out in the restaurant for a short time, but he always wanted to be a musician. He now lives in California with his wife. The middle son, Kamal, on the other hand, came to work in the restaurant directly after college. Eight years older than Nizam, Kamal is the son who promised Ben Ali that he would carry on the family business. So Nizam didn't experience much family pressure to join the business and was able to explore his options.

In college, Nizam realized he loved radio. He was a disc jockey on three college radio stations and held internships with two commercial radio stations. By the time he was 20, "I had one foot in the restaurant and one foot in radio," Nizam said. "I loved them both, but I wasn't doing my best in either one." So Nizam took a year off after college and dedicated himself to working at Ben's Chili Bowl.

Courtesy of Tim Brown

Nizam Ali poses (center, front) with his staff behind the counter at Ben's Chili Bowl.

He learned that the restaurant business is incredibly hard work. "We're open seven days a week and we only close two days a year — Christmas and Thanksgiving," Nizam said. "During the week, we open at 6 a.m. and usually close at 2 a.m. On Friday and Saturday nights, [we close at] 4 a.m. Sunday is our short day — 11 a.m. to 8 p.m."

Still, Nizam didn't know what direction to take in life. His oldest brother, Haidar, urged Nizam to list his goals: owning his own company, seeing the world, and having a wife and family. Then they discussed how to achieve them. "Haidar was convinced that law school was the vehicle to accomplish all the goals," Nizam explained. The University of Maryland School of Law accepted Nizam, but he worried about whether he had the drive to complete three more years of study. His brother was resolute: If you have the opportunity and the means to go to law school, then you have a responsibility to go.

Celebration and Discovery

Nizam passed the Maryland bar exam and was sworn in as a lawyer in December 1996. He practiced law in Maryland in 1997 and early 1998. As summer approached, Nizam realized that August 22, 1998, would be the 40th anniversary of his parents' opening of the restaurant.

Nizam wanted to commemorate the 40th anniversary. "By this time, Dad was 71 and Mom was 65," he said. "I had an idea: Why don't we close the street in front of the restaurant and have a press conference. We'll invite the mayor and city officials to do a tribute to Mom and Dad for Ben's Chili Bowl, for surviving all the adversity and maintaining this place." Nizam and his brother Kamal set to work on plans, phone calls, press releases, and posters.

But what Nizam and Kamal didn't know was that one of their customers would also publicize the event. "He thought the history of Ben's Chili Bowl made a great story, and his wife worked at CNN (the Cable News Network)," said Nizam. So shortly before the anniversary, CNN reporters came to Ben's Chili Bowl to interview the Ali family. They also interviewed the restaurant's most famous fan, comedian Bill Cosby, about the Alis' historic restaurant. The resulting story ran repeatedly on CNN and *Headline News*.

"Suddenly, an event that had started out as a humble thank-you had grown into something much larger," Nizam said. It was a huge success. Officials and customers came together to celebrate their extraordinary neighborhood restaurant. The Alis received a proclamation from the city, which now hangs framed on the restaurant's wall. For the next two weeks, lines of customers stretched outside the restaurant's doors.

"I went on vacation right after the 40th anniversary event," Nizam said. "But I was calling every day, and my family said the crowds were insane — unending. So literally the day I came back, I came straight to the restaurant, and I've worked ever since. I never considered not helping and I've never regretted it."

Nizam says the 40th anniversary made him realize the great love that so many people have for Ben's Chili Bowl. "We were receiving all these accolades, and I knew Ben's had to continue," Nizam said. "Also I realized that my brother could not run the restaurant by himself. Someone has to be here every day to maintain the quality, the integrity, and the cleanliness. Even now, we both work six days a week."

Going into the family business was not Nizam's plan, but he knew in his heart that it was the right thing to do. His father, Ben, is more conflicted. Part of him regrets that Nizam is not practicing law, while another part is really proud of his son for helping carry on the business.

Now Nizam and his wife, Jyotika, have a three-year-old son, Tariq. His brother Kamal and his wife have eight-year-old twins. Nizam says he hopes one of the children goes into the family business.

Earlier this year, the Alis celebrated the restaurant's 50th anniversary with a gala emceed by Bill Cosby, a street party, and a concert to thank the customers, and all the events were free of charge.

According to Nizam, some aspects of the restaurant should never change. "Our staff is like family. Our customers are like visitors to our home. We get to know them," he said. Many people have suggested that Ben's Chili Bowl could become a franchise, but Nizam says no time soon. He and Kamal also have to think about their own quality of life. "If we franchised Ben's, we'd be millionaires, but would my son know who I am?" Nizam asked. "It's about so much more than money."

"Ben's is the flagship," Nizam says. "My biggest fear is that someone who knows and loves the restaurant will say Ben's is not what it used to be. Our respect for the legacy is why people love Ben's so much." ■

The opinions expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. government.

Making Memories To Make a Living

Walter Scheib

© *Time & Life* Pictures/Getty Images

Walter Scheib is seen here in 1994 with then-First Lady Hillary Clinton, as they promoted a diet with fruits and vegetables.

Begin with one measure talent. Add one measure dedication, two measures preparation, and half a measure luck. Blend thoroughly, and allow the mixture to age.

That's the recipe American celebrity chef Walter Scheib followed to advance from the kitchen staff in small restaurants all the way to the position of White House chef.

Walter Scheib was White House chef from 1994 to 2005, serving the families of Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush. He now speaks and consults about the hospitality industry in his business, The American Chef.

I served a rack of lamb, curried red sweet potatoes, and braised Swiss chard when I cooked one of the most important meals of my career for the first lady of the United States.

All you have to do is look at the plate to tell whether people like your cooking or not. An empty plate means they like the food. If it's not empty, that means they don't like it so much.

I looked at the plate in front of Hillary Clinton that day and saw that not only had she eaten the entire rack of lamb, I noticed she was chewing on one of the rib bones. Three days later, they offered me the job as White House chef.

Almost 20 years before that moment, I took my first steps to become a professional chef, and my father just about threw me out of the house. After one year at college, I told him I was going to drop out because my goal was to become a chef. He told me I had to start paying rent, or move out.

My father was a nuclear engineer, a very academically oriented man with multiple degrees from prestigious institutions. Some time early in my own college days, I realized I didn't want the kind of life he had. It just wasn't interesting to me. I didn't want to be a suit-and-tie guy; I wanted to be a white-jacket guy.

So I entered the cruel world of American capitalism, learning a trade, making a living at it, bumping around for a few years. I worked as an assistant manager and a manager at a steakhouse chain in the Washington, D.C., area. I worked as a chef in a number of small restaurants and at various places belonging to corporate chains,

© AP Images/Wilfredo Lee

Scheib (foreground) is shown at work in the White House kitchen.

learning what the business side of it was like. I didn't learn much about cooking from them, but I learned a whole lot about systems management, how to manage people, and how to work with folks.

I recognized that I wanted to be in the hospitality industry as a professional and I was going to need more training. I went to the Culinary Institute of America in New York, America's preeminent culinary school at the time. It was about a 20-month program where you spent seven months in the institute, then worked in the real world for some months, then went back to the institute.

I discovered I was in the right business when I was working as an assistant banquet chef on one of those apprenticeships away from the institute. One day when a banquet was done, the big chef said, "OK, we're going to be introduced to this crowd in the dining room." So the banquet staff goes out there, and 1,200 people in tuxedos and gowns get to their feet and give us a standing ovation. I actually remember getting goose bumps. It was the coolest thing I'd ever seen.

That's the attitude you need for the restaurant or hospitality business. If you don't love— and I mean *love* — making people happy, you're in the wrong business. The conditions are brutal. It's a 10- to15-hour day, late nights, early mornings. If you don't like to see people smiling, then you are in the wrong business. Our goal is to have people say, "Wow! That was wonderful." The secret is to be part of a moment, to make people really enjoy what they're doing right at that moment.

A few years out of the culinary institute, I got a great opportunity at the Greenbrier, a famous old luxury resort in West Virginia. That's where I was when the White House job came open. After I applied, I learned about 4,000 other folks had too. Then the field was narrowed down, and I was one of about 10 invited to actually cook for the first lady, a luncheon audition.

What was I going to do? It was the biggest challenge of my professional life. I listened to everybody. "You should do this, do that, do the other thing." In the end, the best idea was to do what I really did best. If I had tried to do something else, or to be pretentious or fancy, it wouldn't have worked. Food that was simple but very intense really represented what I was. It's a take on a country style that I was doing at the Greenbrier resort – basic sweet potatoes, greens, and lamb. It's a very regional cuisine, but I made it upscale in the presentation and the flavor components. That's what made the difference to Mrs. Clinton.

I told her that day that we could bring contemporary American cuisine to the White House, not just for her private dining but for all the great and grand state dinners and public receptions. She recognized that American cuisine was ready to replace the European style *haute cuisine* that Mrs. Kennedy [First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy] had introduced to the White House in the 1960s. Mrs. Clinton directed me to bring America's cuisine to America's home at the White House. So I formed a team to bring that style of food to the White House, and it was a tremendous professional honor to do that.

And, of course, it was a great personal honor to cook for two unique and distinctive American first families. You got to see them offstage, as the true people they are, regardless of their politics.■

The author's Web site is http://www.theamericanchef.com/index.asp.

Congraduations, Dude

California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger: It Can Be Done

© AP Images/Eric Risberg

California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger is greeted by elementary school students as he pays a visit to a neighborhood in Santa Rosa, California.

Don't listen to the naysayers. How many times do you hear people saying it can't be done? I have heard this my whole life: It can't be done. It can't be done that I come to America; it can't be done to be a bodybuilding champion; it can't be done to go into movies; it can't be done to run for governor. Especially, I remember when I ran for governor: "It can't be done," they said. "You know, you are an actor. What do want to do? Two months before the election you're going to decide that you're going to run for governor? Are you out of your mind? It can't be done. First you have to run for mayor, then maybe for city council, or maybe for assembly or for senate, then for lieutenant governor. You have to work your way up the political ladder. That's the way it works in politics."

I said, "I'm not going after a political career. All I want to do is be governor. And fix the problems of California, turn the economy around, protect the environment, reform education, reform our health care system. That's what I want to do." And I went out and I talked to the people directly and had one town hall meeting after the other, did one interview after the other. And the rest is history. The people sent me to Sacramento [the capital of California]. So don't listen to those kind of things: "It can't."

This excerpt is from a commencement speech delivered at Brentwood School in Los Angeles, California, in 2008. Arnold Schwarzenegger was first elected California's governor in 2003, after a career as an actor and a professional bodybuilder. He is a native of Austria who became an American citizen in 1983. (Excerpt used with permission.)

A Gamer Goes to "The Darkest of Days"

Bill Wadleigh

Courtesy of Susan Brown-Wadleigh

The author is seen here in his office with some of the games he's worked to develop.

Information and communications technologies have been among the nation's most rapidly expanding and dynamic industries in recent decades. A producer of video games explains how he rode the wave from TV to MMORPGs and FPS's – and if you don't know what they are, read on.

Bill Wadleigh is vice president of gaming at Phantom EFX, a developer of casino games and video games for both personal computers and next-generation consoles.

I've always been a gamer. Back when I was a teenager, I played a *Star Trek* game on a college mainframe computer. But that was 1975, when few people were even dreaming that computers would become a home appliance, much less that somebody could have a career making games for computers. So I was at college, majoring in television production. My secret ambition was to be the director of the *CBS Evening News* [a respected U.S. television network broadcast]. Well, that didn't work out, and I don't regret it at all!

Television was a good place to learn a lot of skills that helped me do other things down the line. My first jobs were at universities in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan region, producing video versions of classroom instruction. After a few years, I became very skilled at working on complex technical projects where you juggle a lot of elements — camera operators, talent, content, a schedule, and a budget.

I like to say, when you are good at pushing buttons, they make you king of the button pushers. I was promoted and became responsible for managing the projects rather than actually creating them. I learned how to deliver programs on time and on budget.

In 1994 I took all these acquired skills, headed in a new direction, and changed careers. It was the time of

the Internet "bubble," a time when everyone and their grandmother was coming up with ideas to make a million dollars on the Internet.

A friend told me there was an opening for a project manager at a bleeding-edge [ahead of its time] technology company called VR-1 Entertainment. The company started as an ISP, an Internet service provider, one of many during the early-Internet era. Each ISP was trying to entice more subscribers by developing exclusive features to make their service better than the competition. VR-1 had a games division, but they had no one with experience managing complex technical projects. That's where I came in. Having been a big gamer all my life and knowing a little HTML programming and a lot about managing complex projects, I got the job.

It was a start-up company, so it was a high-risk, high-reward situation. It might have led to a windfall financial gain, but, at the very least, it was an opportunity to make video games. So I left a safe career path and jumped into this brand-new thing. It was a little scary to make all these changes, sure. My wife had just given birth to our son, and that's a time in life when "normal" people settle down and stay put in their careers. But I am often reminded of a saying that describes my career experiences and path: "A ship in harbor is safe, but that's not what ships are built for." [William G.T. Shedd, 19th-century American theologian and author]

The world of video games in 1994 was completely different than today. Everquest®, World of Warcraft®, and the other common massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) were only risky ideas, not the huge successes they are today. The challenge in making online games was to make small, downloadable games, with high replayability and a social component so players could chat with one another.VR-1 had a tool called Conductor, which allowed hundreds of players around the world to play together in a single game. Today this is normal, but in the days of the 9600 baud dial-up modem, it was truly a breakthrough that gave the company its competitive edge.

I served as the producer for VR-1 Crossroads® and later worked on Fighter Ace 1.5® for Microsoft, a series of e-mail games for Hasbro Interactive, and an Xbox launch title. Then the company went the way of so many that sprang on the scene during the dot-com bubble. It downsized and scrambled for survival but eventually closed.

After leaving VR-1 in 2000, I worked for some of the biggest corporate players in the gaming industry. I worked in several roles as I was promoted from producer to director of game studios for slot machines, gambling devices, and online gaming. All told, I was responsible for nearly 100 different games that made millions of dollars for the companies. Along the way, I also became a patented inventor of new gaming ideas and products.

In 2007, I joined Phantom EFX in Cedar Falls, Iowa. I lead an international team of artists and computer programmers making video games. We develop casual entertainment, one of the largest growth areas in the software world. We make card games, poker, slots, and table games.

My first project here is a First Person Shooter (FPS) Darkest of Days™ for PC and Xbox 360 that will be released in early 2009. It's another technological challenge for me, working with a new team using a new, custom-built graphics engine to make a state-of-the-art game. I use all the skills, experiences, and tricks I have learned in this job. I am in my element.

I have been riding technology all the way. For me, the exciting thing about the road I've taken is to work on products that are just on the other side of the horizon. I found my dream job; it just took me a couple of decades to get here. ■

A Tribute to Dirty, Difficult, Dangerous Jobs

An Interview with Mike Rowe

Courtesy of Discovery Channel

Mike Rowe takes a break from his assignment for the day, a trash dump in St. Louis, Missouri.

An unlikely television program has become a surprising success with a devoted fan base. Dirty Jobs *on the Discovery Channel, now entering its fourth season, has been one of the network's top series in the United States since it began in 2005. In every episode, host Mike Rowe goes to a different job site, rolls up his sleeves, and works side by side with people who perform these tasks for a living every day. By design, the show seeks out people who do jobs that are very dirty, unheralded, and sometimes almost unimaginable to people in cleaner lines of work.*

Mike Rowe had an almost 20-year career in performance and television before he conceived of Dirty Jobs *and successfully convinced the Discovery Channel to back the project. He spoke to* eJournal USA's *managing editor Charlene Porter.*

Question: You have a set introduction for every show. Recite it for me and explain what it says about your regard for dirty jobs and manual labor.

Rowe: My name is Mike Rowe. And this is my job: I explore the country, looking for people who aren't afraid to get dirty — hard-working men and women who do the kinds of jobs that make civilized life possible for the rest of us. Now get ready to get dirty.

That's the mission statement for the show. We're finding people who are doing work that most of us go out of our way to avoid. I spend a day with them as an apprentice, try to keep up with them, and have a few laughs. The success of the show, I believe, is a result of those underlying themes about work that we constantly come back to, not just because of the exploding toilets and misadventures in animal husbandry.

Q: There are a lot of things going on in your show. You introduce the audience to jobs that are unseen, even unknown, for the millions of Americans leading nice, clean suburban lives. At the same time, you highlight the skill, the dignity, the humor of the people who do these jobs. Is it intentional that you have those dual themes?

Rowe: It was very deliberate. The show started as a small segment on a local show in San Francisco. I was able to experiment quite a bit with what audiences responded to before I ever took the program to a network. I learned from doing these smaller profiles that there was a real mix between the interest the audience would have in the job itself and in the people who are performing the work. There is no dignity in work alone. The dignity is in the people. You can't do a show about work that highlights

Courtesy of Discovery Channel

Rowe helps extract this military truck from the mud.

the good parts of it unless you also include a show about people that highlights the good parts of them.

Q: How many different dirty jobs have you done since the show has been on? And can you give me a list of some of them?

Rowe: I finished my 200th a couple of months ago. We're now in the fourth season of the show, and when we began the intention was to do 12 programs, 12 jobs. I ran out of ideas around 50, and ever since, we've turned the programming of the show over to the viewers. Most of the ideas come in from people who actually watch the show.

I've done everything from road-kill picker-upper, chicken sexer, artificial cow inseminator, bricklayer, tannery worker, roofer — anybody who works with hot tar and asphalt deserves a medal. The list includes anything that would pop into your mind immediately, then a whole lot of things you never even dreamed of.

Q: I heard you say on the program once, "As my grandfather said, never trust a fellow with clean shoes." Did he really say that? What did he do?

Rowe: My grandfather is the reason *Dirty Jobs* is on the air. He had a seventh-grade education but was one of those fellows born hard-wired with an innate understanding of construction and technical trades. He built my first car. He built the house I was born in without a blueprint. By the time he was 50, he was a master plumber, master electrician, a bricklayer, a stone mason. At the base of his brain, he just knew how stuff worked mechanically and technically.

I didn't get that gene.

He was a naturally smart guy who was always dirty, always fixing things, always tinkering. My earliest memories are of him and my father, who worked as his apprentice, starting the day clean and coming home dirty and solving some kind of problem along the way.

Q: It's clear in your words and your voice that you had a great deal of admiration for him.

Rowe: Yes.

Q: But some people today might look down on people with dirty shoes. Why is that?

Rowe: After doing a couple hundred jobs myself, I have formed a few theories about that. I don't think anybody ever set out to disparage the worker, but as a society we have declared kind of a Cold War on the traditional notions of manual labor. We do it in a lot of different ways. On TV, I first noticed it with *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*, the first show that deliberately embraced the opposite of the Puritan work ethic. Today, you can see the portrayals of working people in prime-time television in a predictable way. Plumbers weigh 300 pounds and their pants are falling down. Delivery drivers are enormous, lazy people who are the brunt of the joke.

Then the advertising industry pitches the message that the reason we're not as happy as we could be is that we have to work too hard. We work too much, and we're constantly reminded we want to get to the weekend a little faster, punch out a little early, and enjoy retirement a little sooner.

So the traditional notions of work have become a target. A war on work has casualties — declining trades, a crumbling infrastructure — and those are things that affect us all.

Then there are larger national trends: policies that lead to the outsourcing of thousands of American factory jobs, the invention of the microchip and other technological tools that replace the traditional toolbox.

Q: You mean the transition from a production-industrial economy to an information-based economy.

Rowe: Exactly. So we've redefined what a good job looks like. It's not that people with muddy boots are considered bad. They've just been marginalized. We no longer celebrate guys like my grandfather. We don't denigrate them necessarily; we just ignore them.

Hard work needs a public relations campaign, so I'm getting a Web site started to focus some attention on these issues. I'm calling it MikeRoweWORKS™ *[www.mikeroweWORKS.com]*, and I'm thinking along the lines of "Rock the Vote," only more like "Back to Work!"

Q: You have been an actor, a singer, a TV performer, all pretty clean jobs. When you were at the age of deciding what to be when you grew up, did you make a conscious choice to get a clean job?

Rowe: I made a deliberate choice when I was 18 years old. My grandfather lived right next door to us, and he was as present in my life as my dad. I couldn't do all the things that my grandfather could do, so I simply got sick of failing. I had an appreciation and respect for the kind of work he did, but I decided to go as far from it as I could and try and find something that came as easily to me as construction came to him.

Q: What do you mean failing? Your grandfather gave you a hammer and you couldn't hit the nail?

Rowe: I could get the nail in the wood; it's just that it wasn't easy. I can hang drywall; it just takes me longer. I was constantly struggling to do what they did with ease. I got sick of that. I didn't know anything about entertainment; I didn't know anything about performing, but I did know that it was going to require a completely different part of my brain. As [American poet] Robert Frost said, "Way leads on to way" [from "The Road Not Taken"], right? Next thing I know, I'm dressed like a Viking, and I'm singing in the national opera. Then after that, I'm selling stuff in the middle of the night on QVC [a cable television shopping channel]. Then I'm producing a show for American Airlines that airs on all their flights. Then I'm working with Dick Clark, then Joan Rivers; then I'm a freelancing travel guy; then I'm at the Discovery Channel.

The big irony for me is that after 18 years of freelancing in television, I finally have a hit on an international network that is the leading provider of nonfiction entertainment in the world. All I had to do to get this job was to go back and embrace the precise things that I spent my adult life running from.

I ran from that because I didn't want to fail in front of my dad and my grandfather. Now whatever success I have has a very specific price. That is, my willingness to fail every day, not just in front of them, but in front of millions of people in 173 countries. The only way to pay tribute to a really good landscaper, for instance, is to put a novice landscaper next to him — that's me — and let the viewer watch the two of them do the same basic job. That's how the show pays a tribute to these people. Watching me doing the job with the landscaper — or whatever worker we're featuring — viewers can connect the dots and realize that most jobs are harder than they look.

Q: You also have said on the show that some of the happiest people you've ever met go home every day smelling bad because they work with stuff like sewage and garbage. Are you saying that workers you meet in dirty jobs are generally happier people than you meet in cleaner professions?

Rowe: It's a generalization, but I'll stand by it. Happiness is a tough, subjective thing to define. But I will say that after a couple hundred of these experiences, the thing I find is balance in the lives of people I've met. People with dirty jobs have a balance in their lives that I don't see in my friends who are actuarial accountants and investment bankers. They start their day clean; they wind up coming home dirty, but somehow they seem to be having a better time than the rest of us.

I have a lot of theories on that, but at base, it has to do with the sense of completing a task. So many "good" jobs these days don't give you a sense of closure. For a lot of people in office work, the desk looks the same at 6 p.m. as it did at 6 a.m. How do you know when you are done?

People I work with — hey, they got a dead deer in the road. They do their work and it's gone. You got a ditch to put in. In the morning, it's not there. In the evening, it is. People with dirty jobs live in a world of constant feedback. For better or worse, they always know how they're doing. That matters.

Courtesy of Discovery Channel

Rowe has his share of mishaps on the job, as on this day at a yak ranch in Montana.

People in the building trades — the stone mason who can walk through town and point to structures he created. That's a legacy. Even skilled factory work is really a rewarding thing when it is mastered. That's the exact thing we don't portray fairly in our culture today. Most manual work is now presented as some form of drudgery.

We shouldn't try to draw a stark line between clean and dirty, hard and easy. These aren't opposites; they're different sides of the same thing. People with dirty jobs seem to have an innate understanding of that — and a better balance in life.

Q: Besides dirty jobs, you do dangerous ones too. I've seen you swimming with sharks, grabbing alligators, hanging off of cable cars at the top of a 3,000-meter cliff. You do these jobs for a day and hope your luck holds out. But what's your sense of the motives of people who perform dangerous jobs day after day?

Rowe: I'll tell you a story. You mention swimming with sharks. I was working that day with Jeremiah Sullivan, the guy who invented the shark suit, which divers can wear to get in the water where sharks are circling and come out with all their limbs. So I'm standing at the end of a boat with Jeremiah, about to dive into a shark feeding frenzy. I'm wrapped up in this protective shark suit, which is kind of like chain mail that a medieval knight wore. I'm scared to death, by the way. Right before we jump in, Jeremiah says to me, very matter-of-factly, "Look, Mike, man-to-man, I got to level with you."

"Yeah?" I say.

He said, "This is going to hurt. You're not going to die, but this is going to hurt like hell, and you need to know that." It was an amazingly sober moment because in that second he put personal accountability and awareness squarely on my shoulders [see box].

Q: It's going to hurt, sharks are knocking you around, snapping at you, and Jeremiah does it anyway, day after day?

Rowe: Every day. Interestingly, the places where I've been that you mention, rightly, as dangerous – they have a very low incidence of injuries and accidents on those work sites because workers in these places have this sense of their own personal safety. They aren't lulled into a sense of complacency about it. I think that can happen in a factory or workplace where management hangs banners about "safety first." It becomes a platitude, a buzz phrase, and that's when people can get hurt. Your own safety is your own business, and you can't lose sight of that.

Q: Looking back on the winding path of your career, what do you say to someone on the verge of adulthood trying to figure out what to do in life?

Rowe: There is a term in Greek literature for a reversal of fortune. It's called *peripeteia*: when the character realizes he was wrong about everything, when Oedipus realizes he's been sleeping with his mother. Bruce Willis realizes at the end of *The Sixth Sense* that he's been dead the whole movie. That's a peripeteitic discovery. So I'd say to a 19-year-old that it's OK to realize that you are completely wrong about something.

I had one of these moments a couple of years ago: Everything I thought I knew about work has been wrong. What I saw growing up was right. I realized how I had overreacted in my intent to get as far away from it as I could. Now through fate, luck, or serendipity, I've been pulled back, and I'm completely surrounded by the

very people I grew up with. I spent 20 years avoiding something that seems destined today, and it's all fine. Everything is happening the way it's supposed to be happening.

So the practical advice that comes from that to somebody who is 19 years old is, don't limit your options. Don't do it. Today, a lot of people 18 and 19 years old aren't being told that they could have a lucrative career in the technical trades. It's not part of the path that most parents assume their children should take. The college route, the "ideal" jobs, the "ideal" clothes, the lifestyle — everything we celebrate in this culture doesn't really redound to the plumber, the electrician, the steamfitter, or the pipe fitter. There are opportunities in all those areas. Their ranks are depleted in the United States today. Our infrastructure is crumbling. There is a real opportunity to master a trade and either strike out on your own, or be employed by a decent company, make a good living, raise your kids, coach their baseball team, and have a balanced life.

You may look at that life and say, nope, I'd rather be a corporate executive. Fine. All I'd suggest is that you look at all your options before you make those kinds of decisions.

I want this Web site, *mikeroweWORKS*, to really help kids in making some of those decisions, presenting those options about opportunities in skilled labor. I've already received lots of great feedback, much of it from parents who want a place where they and their kids can investigate career options that aren't necessarily college-dependent. So I want kids to be able to do that, and plumbers, electricians, and all kinds of contractors say that they would like a place to chat, exchange stories and experiences. Eventually, I see *mikeroweWORKS* as a robust place where people can gather to share, educate, and celebrate the business of working. ■

The opinions expressed in this interview do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. government.

Swimming with Sharks

Mike Rowe shares a story about one of his most dangerous jobs.

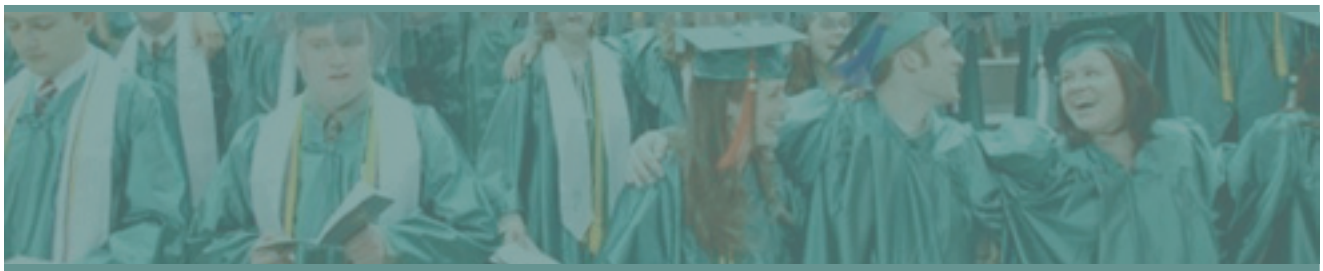
The job of the day was to make and test a "shark suit," a steel mesh contraption consisting of several hundred thousand tiny, metal rings that must all be welded together by hand. To test the suit, I headed out to sea. I was accompanied by Jeremiah Sullivan, a dyed-in-the-wool lunatic who fears nothing and should have his own TV show.

Jeremiah and I proceeded to create a massive pond of blood and tuna bits. Many dozens of sharks appeared and surrounded the boat in a frenzy of uncontrolled dining. The water was a boiling mass of gray skin, red blood, and white teeth. Then wearing full scuba gear and shark suits, Jeremiah jumped directly into their midst. I followed. Together, we descended 50 feet [15 meters] to the bottom. I knelt next to him as he opened a bait box full of bonito [a fish in size and characteristics between mackerels and tunas]. Sharks love, really love, bonito. Within moments, the pandemonium that had existed on the surface was transferred to the ocean floor. We then began the actual job, which was to test the effectiveness of the suits we were wearing. In other words, get bit by sharks. On purpose.

When I say that we were completely surrounded by dozens of ravenous sharks, I am not exaggerating. When I say that we were bitten, rammed, and slammed into the sandy bottom time and time again, I'm not engaging in hyperbole. And when I tell you that I was profoundly frightened for my life, I am not even kidding a little.

I was bitten four or five times. Jeremiah, many more. We're both fine, albeit bruised. Shark suits work. Hallelujah.

Mike Rowe blogs about many of his experiences on http://dsc.discovery.com/fansites/dirtyjobs/dirtyjobs.html.



Congraduations, Dude

U.S. Supreme Court Associate Justice Stephen Breyer: Our Choices Write a Story

© AP Images/Josh Reynolds

Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer talks with students at Harvard Law School in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

The best advice I received when I was your age was from a former law school dean, Bayless Manning. And I shall repeat it. Bayless understood that I, like you, was anxiously wondering: What comes next? He pointed out that when we make an important personal decision, we rarely know more than 10 percent of all we would like to know. We know that our decision will open certain doors, but we often cannot know which ones it will close. We agonize over the decision, but sometimes agonizing does not help. Sometimes we must simply choose. Once we reach a decision, our lives then shape themselves around the choices that we make. Those choices then write a story — and that is a metaphor I have found useful. Every person's life is a story of passion, with its moments of joy and happiness, of tragedy and sorrow. And each person's story is different, each from the other….

What we do and how we explain our choices tell us who we are. We cannot escape the negative meaning that a failure of integrity — a failure to live up to our own standards of right and wrong — will give to the stories we ourselves shape. I agree with the philosopher who said that money can vanish overnight, power can disappear, reputation can evaporate, but character — personal integrity — is a rock that stays secure.

Justice Breyer spoke to the graduating class of the New School University in New York City in 2005. (Excerpt used with permission.)

Choosing a Career in Changing Times

Phyllis McIntosh

© AP Images/Damian Dovarganes

The City of Los Angeles, California, operates a Metro Job Service where job seekers can hunt for openings online.

Rapidly advancing technologies and economic realignment have brought significant upheaval to the U.S. employment market, changing the way young people make choices as they move from school into the workplace.

Phyllis McIntosh is a Washington, D.C.-based freelance journalist with extensive experience covering employment issues.

In some ways, it has never been easier for young Americans to pursue a career. A wealth of information about education opportunities, potential employers, and specific job openings is as close as the nearest computer. Yet, many young people today are taking longer than previous generations to complete their education, find a job that suits them, and settle onto a career path. They are choosier about jobs they accept and likely to change jobs more frequently. To this generation, loyalty between employer and employee is a bygone concept.

Cyber Surfing for Careers

No development has had a greater impact on how Americans search for jobs than the Internet. In the past, graduating students had no choice but to attend career fairs, meet with company representatives, and peruse reams of information at the campus career center in order to learn about job possibilities in their field. Today, students can, at their own convenience, research potential employers via company Web sites and even apply for jobs online. "Many students find it more comfortable to explore in a passive way," says Edwin W. Koc, research director for the

National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE). "The disadvantage is that this makes it more difficult for employers to judge the student as a job candidate. Employers here in the United States still rely very much on face-to-face contact. Our surveys show that students who landed jobs earliest were those who combined a Web search with direct meetings with employers."

The newest online tools for job seekers are the popular social networking sites, such as Facebook, MySpace, and LinkedIn, which enable users to let hundreds of people know instantaneously that they are in the market for a particular kind of job. Employers seeking to fill jobs also are turning to these sites. In Koc's surveys, about 16 percent of employers say they use the social network sites as part of their recruiting, and 7 percent of students say they have been contacted by an employer directly through their social network site. The downside for job applicants is that many more employers — 44 percent — use the sites to check the personal profiles of potential job candidates, according to a survey by www.Vault.com, a Web site that focuses on careers. More than 80 percent of these employers say that seeing something negative in a job candidate's online profile would affect their decision to hire.

The Internet also is making it possible for more and more Americans to earn college degrees online, a convenience especially for older students with jobs and family responsibilities. However, in a Vault survey, 63 percent of employers said they would favor a job candidate with a traditional college degree over one with an online degree. On the positive side, 83 percent of employers and hiring managers consider online degrees more acceptable now than five years ago.

© AP Images/Al Behrman

Students at the Cincinnati State Technical and Community College can look for job opportunities posted on bulletin boards around the campus. Many state-sponsored community college systems place special emphasis on training students for job specialties needed by particular employers in their area.

Postponing Adulthood

While the job search itself may be easier, young Americans seem to be having more trouble charting their course in life. Indeed, many stumble into a career rather than pursuing their education with a clear-cut career goal in mind, according to John Flato, vice president of research and consulting at Vault. Half of all college students change their major during their first year. And while more than 40 percent of freshmen plan to go on to graduate studies or professional school, that number drops to 20 percent by the time they are seniors. An NACE study showed that most college students elect a major because they enjoy the course work. Except in fields such as engineering, where undergraduate work is strictly designed to prepare students for a specific career, students do not connect their major with what they will do when they graduate, Koc says.

Perhaps because of all this uncertainty, it now takes college students an average of six years to complete what used to be a four-year degree, says Flato. One reason, he notes, is that colleges are anxious to retain students and do not allow those who change majors to take an extra

course load in order to graduate in the traditional four-year time frame.

Nor does graduation from college automatically launch young people into adulthood. Overall, they are marrying later, and for economic reasons many move back home. Doting parents are content to provide some continuing financial support, and some stay deeply involved in their adult children's lives — even to the point, say career experts, of accompanying them to job interviews or calling an employer to find out why their son or daughter wasn't hired.

To many young graduates, the first job is merely a stepping stone; half change jobs within 12 to 18 months. "In some ways, the exploratory process that used to occur in college is occurring during the first years in the work force," says Daniel H. Pink, an author and lecturer on issues of careers and employment. "A certain amount of stumbling [into a career] is inevitable and I think healthy when you have a labor market that is hard to predict."

Shifting Trends

One of the most significant trends in the United States is the disappearance of long-term loyalty to an employer. Young people recognize that changing jobs is the fastest way to advance in both salary and responsibility, and unlike their parents and grandparents, few expect to stay with the same company for decades. Nor do they expect long-term loyalty and job security from employers. "People are seeing their friends and family going through layoffs, terminations, and acquisitions, so they're saying if companies are going to do that, I'm going to look out for myself," notes Flato.

For their part, employers are making it easier than ever to change jobs. Health insurance coverage for new employees usually starts immediately, with no waiting period, and traditional company pensions have been replaced by 401(K) retirement plans. Employees make their own contributions to these plans, and keep the funds even when they leave a job.

More than any previous generation, young Americans are searching for meaning in their work. Surveys show that they seek out employers who are environmentally friendly and socially responsible, and they want jobs where they can make a difference in the world. They gravitate also to employers who provide a variety of workplace amenities, such as fitness centers, on-site health care and child care, barbershops, laundry and dry-cleaning services — anything that makes it easier to balance work and personal life. In several recent surveys, college students asked to name their ideal employers gave top billing to the giant search-engine company Google, famous for its free gourmet cafeteria and other amenities for employees.

For a significant number of young people, geographic location is a major deciding factor in job acceptance. Some are seeking a certain lifestyle in or near a major city or a specific region of the country. Many also prefer to stick with the familiar and will decline a job offer because it is too far from home, according to an NACE study.

Despite their choosiness, recent college graduates can expect their employment opportunities to remain relatively strong, experts say, as the U.S. economy pulls out of recession. Young hires are attractive to employers, because they are less expensive to recruit and more receptive to on-the-job training than more seasoned employees. As workers born in the years following World War II — the so-called baby boomers — begin to retire in the next few years, large numbers of jobs will open up, especially in government and education, Koc predicts. He adds that overall job prospects will remain good for business majors — the most popular college major in the United States — although many jobs in the finance sector have disappeared as a result of the late-2008 turmoil in U.S. markets.

As more and more routine tasks are assigned to computers, "skills such as artistry, inventiveness, empathy, and big-picture thinking, already at a premium today, also will become even more important," says Dan Pink.

One thing is certain: In today's economy, nothing is more constant than change, both in the way young Americans approach careers and in the kinds of jobs they will occupy. As Pink says, "Some young people can expect to land jobs 10 or 20 years from now in industries that might not even exist today and have job titles we might not even have the vocabulary for today."

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Giving Public Service, Gaining a Career

Siobhan Dugan

Courtesy of CNCS

AmeriCorps members serve with numerous nonprofit organizations to address social needs, such as building homes for homeless people.

For more than 40 years, the U.S. government has sponsored programs that engage young people in public service. These programs are widely supported for the contributions that participants make. The young volunteers also leave the programs with a new view of their talents, their capabilities, and their futures.

Siobhan Dugan is a public affairs specialist at the Corporation for National and Community Service, the parent organization of AmeriCorps, which offers 75,000 opportunities each year for adults to help meet critical community needs across the country.

AmeriCorps members are known for helping others. They run after-school programs, build trails in national parks, face down forest fires, and respond to national disasters ranging from the September 11 terrorist attacks to Hurricane Katrina. The people they serve are overwhelmingly grateful for these efforts. But when an AmeriCorps member ends a year-long term of service, what then?

Many AmeriCorps members agree that their service helps them develop skills that ready them for future careers. They also report that AmeriCorps helps them figure out which careers they want to pursue. Those beliefs are backed up by *Still Serving: Measuring the Eight-Year Impact of AmeriCorps on Alumni*, a 2008 report that analyzed the impacts of AmeriCorps service on a group of 2,000 members eight years after their service, compared with a control group of similar individuals who did not serve.

The study, the most rigorous ever conducted about AmeriCorps's impacts on members, conclusively demonstrates that AmeriCorps exposes members to new career opportunities and is beneficial to them in the job market. About 80 percent of members reported that their service exposed them to new career options, and more than two-thirds of the former members reported that their service was an advantage when job hunting after they completed their AmeriCorps service.

Serving Youth

Take Brian McClendon, 29, who grew up in New York City's Harlem and has been associated with what is now called the Harlem Children's Zone since high school. These days he oversees AmeriCorps members and works closely with the children served by the community service program, never forgetting that he was once in their situation.

Serving as an AmeriCorps member provided McClendon with the framework for his current management duties. "Without that basis," he said, "I don't think I would be successful." AmeriCorps also gave him "the opportunity to work with families, with children in the community, and polish my social skills. Dealing with so many different personalities, addressing their needs, it's been a wonderful experience."

AmeriCorps service introduced him to a host of new

Photo by M.T. Harmon/ Courtesy of CNCS

Torie Bowman worked on watershed projects in U.S. western states. Service in AmeriCorps has inspired her to pursue a career in environmental law.

skills, including conflict resolution, mediation, and classroom management. "Most of all, it gave me the ability to serve as a leader in my classroom, my schools, and in my community," he said.

Serving also gave him new career plans. As a child and teenager, he had set his eye on a future in law enforcement; his undergraduate degree is in criminal justice. AmeriCorps changed his goal, he says, but there is a connection to his new goals in community service. He sees his role as "preventing problems and heading them off." By the time police get involved in a situation, "it's too late, the law's been broken." Instead, McClendon said, working with young people early in their lives, especially during early childhood, "gives kids a fighting chance. It's a much more powerful influence."

Although he still feels a strong respect for the criminal justice side of the equation, he views his career choice as having a "more profound impact" on those served by Harlem Children's Zone. The organization has been providing education, social-service, and community-building programs to children and families living in Harlem since the 1970s.

These days, he's also working on a master's degree in public administration, which will "give me extra teeth [credentials] in the area of managing the public-service system. I wouldn't have decided to do that if I hadn't had the AmeriCorps experience."

Protecting Water

Halfway across the country in Colorado, Torie Bowman, a current AmeriCorps member, is planning to take her life in a new direction when her service ends. Like McClendon, AmeriCorps has provided Bowman an introduction to a different career, one that will continue the work she is doing now.

Bowman, 25, is an AmeriCorps VISTA team leader with the Western Hardrock Water Team, working on water quality issues, particularly those impacted by mines. The program focuses on getting groups concerned about preservation of the watershed to start working with each other across political boundaries, such as state lines. By focusing on the watershed level, Bowman is striving to unite groups on common issues.

As a team leader, Bowman recruits more VISTA members to help reach other watershed groups. She started her VISTA service last year with the Appalachian Coal Country Watershed Team in West Virginia. Her work has focused on watersheds in small historic mining communities, where the mining industry has negative effects on the watersheds. "I do a lot of site visits and networking, partnership building around the state," she said. She also plans events for training sessions and VISTA gatherings, and she does plenty of grant writing.

The experience has prompted Bowman to take the Law School Aptitude Test, with the ultimate goal of working in environmental law. She worked as a white-water rafting guide for two years before signing on with AmeriCorps. "My career and service terms have been a huge transition for me, to use my brain and not just my body," she said.

Bowman received a bachelor's degree in religion and art history from Wake Forest University in 2005. "The degree is definitely part of why I looked at VISTA," she

said. "The degree didn't give me an idea of what my practical skills were. I wanted to do some intense work that would allow me to develop those skills."

She has definitely achieved that goal. "For me, pretty much everything I know about myself personally is from my service experience. I've learned that I enjoy working with people. I can handle the paperwork, but more than that, I love matching people up, and networking and partnership building. It's forced me to understand issues and be a well-informed person, especially about water quality issues."

Bowman finds, though, that working in a nonprofit organization can be limiting. "Law school stuck out as a way I can be more effective, especially in water quality work." Colorado has been a good place to become involved in water quality issues, according to Bowman. Water quality is important everywhere, but water quality and quantity are tightly managed in this Rocky Mountain state because of resource scarcity.

Bowman is currently applying to law schools, targeting the top environmental law schools as her first choices. She also wants to study Native American law issues, an interest that was sparked by studying Native American politics and spirituality in college.

Communicating in Communities

Angelina Moya, 23, is now job hunting in her native Aurora, Illinois, and nearby Chicago, after finishing a term of service with AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) in July. She holds a bachelor's degree in communication studies and wants to use the combination of her education and community service experience to find a position in the nonprofit sector.

"I've found that [job hunting] is a big challenge," she said. "The Chicago market is competitive and organizations are having money issues."

That aside, she said that her NCCC service provided her with a wealth of experience in critical areas. NCCC members are assigned to teams of 10 to 12 people that serve together for a year and live together in dormitory-like settings.

"One of the greatest things I learned from NCCC was interpersonal skills," Moya said. "My team was very diverse, with a lot of different personalities. We had strong personalities. That's one of the challenging things but one of the best things about my experience." Because working with diverse people is a given in most workplaces, Moya recognizes the need for flexibility. "I think I'm a little more open minded now," she said.

Moya worked in a variety of locations on vastly different projects while with NCCC. In Lake Charles, Louisiana, where residents are still grappling with damage from Hurricane Rita of 2005, her team served on a Habitat for Humanity project, building a house on 4.2-meter (14-foot) stilts to protect it from future hurricanes. In Ketchikan, Alaska, her team renovated a 100-year-old building to turn it into a youth community center. On another posting to Louisiana, the team worked at a Habitat for Humanity warehouse, delivering materials to homes under construction.

In addition to her role as a team member, Moya served as a media liaison for her team. "Before NCCC, the communication studies [experience] was so broad, I needed to narrow it down. Now I have this background in community service, and developed an interest and love for it, so I want to continue. That helped me solidify my future plans and career path."

Although AmeriCorps service provided these three members with experience that will help them achieve success in their careers, none of them see that as the most important aspect of the program. AmeriCorps members have a huge impact on those they serve. As Brian McClendon put it, "I think we saved a lot of lives; a lot of lives needed to be saved. I'm on the front line." ■

AmeriCorps is a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service, a federal agency that improves lives, strengthens communities, and fosters civic engagement through service and volunteering. Each year the corporation engages more than 4 million Americans of all ages and backgrounds in service to meet local needs through its Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, VISTA, NCCC, and Learn and Serve America programs. For more information, visit www.nationalservice.gov.

Empowering a Community

Gwen Moore

Photo by Jeffrey Phelps, Courtesy of *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*. Published with permission

Congresswoman Gwen Moore kisses members of a dance troupe who performed the evening she was first elected to congress in 2004. She was elected to her third term in 2008.

Before Americorps, there was VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America), created in 1965 as part of the War on Poverty initiated by President Lyndon Johnson. About 10 years later, a young African-American woman joined VISTA to help her neighborhood in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and began a lifetime of service.

Gwen Moore is a member of the U.S. House of Representatives, elected in 2004, and the first African American to represent the state of Wisconsin in Congress. Prior to her congressional service, she was an elected official in state government for 14 years and was recognized as VISTA Volunteer of the Decade 1976-1986.

"We will either find a way, or make one."

That was the motto when I was sworn into Volunteers in Service to America in the 1970's, and it became my personal mantra.

I went into VISTA because the neighborhood where I grew up had lost its way. I was a board member of the Midtown Neighborhood Association in my hometown of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and we were struggling to lift people out of poverty.

I was a lifelong resident of Midtown, and I could see the financial quicksand that was sucking the community down. People who earned very little money to begin with paid unreasonable rates for loans and insurance. Traditional financial institutions didn't want to serve poor urban neighborhoods. Businesses crumbled and closed.

On the association board, we knew that the lack of banking resources was a key element in the decline of our neighborhood. Institutions were not investing in the neighborhoods around us, and opportunities commonly available elsewhere were just dreams. My neighborhood group realized the community needed a local financial

© 1982 Courtesy of CNCS

Moore (first row, second from the left) was among this group of VISTA members completing a training program in 1982.

institution to provide a foundation on which to build a stable future.

The association board asked me to become a VISTA [volunteer] and organize a financial empowerment initiative. Our project was to establish the Cream City Community Development Credit Union to offer basic banking and loans for projects that created jobs, cultivated local businesses, and contributed to the development of Milwaukee's inner city.

We had to start from the very beginning. We didn't have staplers, pens, paper, or desks. We begged, borrowed, and negotiated rock-bottom prices for office furniture and supplies. My colleagues and I worked almost every night, weekend, and holiday to transform our dream into an enterprise.

In early November of my first year, we learned about a federal government loan program that might provide some operating capital. The November 30 application deadline was less than a month away. We worked day and night pulling together the necessary documentation and forms. Days before the deadline, we worked through the Thanksgiving holiday, gathered around my dining room table to finish our application and business plan. Completing that work with turkey and cranberry sauce on the side is still one of my fondest holiday memories. Our diligence paid off and we received a $10,000 loan, which provided the initial capital we needed to open the credit union.

Then we had to win over the residents of the community. By going door-to-door, we convinced residents to open accounts at Cream City. The minimum account opening balance had to be $50, which was a lot of money in a community where the majority of people were on welfare. But we got enough accounts to prove that Cream City could become a valued community institution.

When we were finally able to open Cream City's doors, I was mesmerized by the effect it had on the community. People were able to start thinking about building assets instead of just making ends meet. They could invest in the community by getting a home or small business loan, then give back to the community by hiring residents or improving their small part of the neighborhood.

Economic activity in Midtown began to buzz. Groups formed that eventually brought in a coin-operated laundry and a health clinic. Cream City created an economic momentum that led to housing development and an improved quality of life. Other businesses followed, the community developed a new pride, and the neighborhood experienced a renaissance.

Too many people believe that where you start out dictates where you end up. That didn't happen to me, and it shouldn't happen to anyone. VISTA — now known as AmeriCorps-VISTA — made the difference for me and the community where I grew up. Now, more than 30 years later, the Midtown area is thriving, growing, and proud. The Cream City Federal Credit Union led the way for this poor inner-city community to take control of its destiny. Cream City eventually morphed into another institution, and today my family still does its banking there.

Through my VISTA experience, I learned the value of self-help, coalition building, interracial cooperation, and mobilization. I gained self-confidence, patience, and faith, as well as financial, networking, and organizational skills. Above all, I realized that great things can be accomplished with the collective strength of community, thus strengthening my commitment to community service. Now I serve on the Financial Services Committee in the U.S. House of Representatives and have the opportunity to help other struggling communities. Without my VISTA service, I doubt I would have been able to attain this position.

But my VISTA service wasn't about empowering me — it was about empowering the people and the community. Projects like Cream City Community Development Credit Union are VISTA's legacy because they blazed a trail that others followed. That trail leads the way out of poverty. ■

Congraduations, Dude

Recording Artist Billy Joel: My Job Became My Friend

© AP Images/Alex Brandon

Singer-songwriter Billy Joel sang the national anthenm at the 2007 Super Bowl, one of the biggest sporting events of the year.

I congratulate you all for staying with your academic pursuits. I couldn't do it. And now I wish I had studied more myself. It would help me in my own musical efforts these days. I'm asked often why am I changing, why am I doing different kinds of music. To quote from Bob Dylan in a song called "It's Alright Ma": "He who is not busy being born, is busy dying." And that's why I'm doing it.

I am only certain of one thing in my life. I knew what I loved to do, and I did what I loved to do. And at this point in my life I'm still loving what I do. I never did it to make a lot of money. I did it to make a living. And in doing so, I made a life. I guess what I'm saying here is that my job became my friend, my fortune, and my great love. And that no matter what lofty personal goals I set for myself, life came along and whacked me upside the head and sent me in directions I never intended to go. But I learned to adjust. I used the survival lessons as substance for future material. To borrow another great line from Bernie Taupin and my good friend Elton John: "I'm still standing." And I'm still standing here on Long Island where I came from in the first place.

Billy Joel spoke at Southhampton College, Long Island University, in 2000. A classically trained musician with decades of hit recordings, he is enrolled in the Songwriters Hall of Fame and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. (Excerpt used with permission.)

Every Call Is Different

Andrea Clark

Courtesy of Andrea Clark

Andrea Clark in full gear at the City of Fairfax, Virginia, firehouse.

A female firefighter recalls how she gave up a career in engineering to enter a lower-paying, high-risk profession.

Andrea Clark is a 15-year veteran firefighter and paramedic. She told her story to freelance journalist Phyllis McIntosh.

I was just over a year into my engineering career when I decided this wasn't for me and I wanted to pursue becoming a firefighter. I graduated in 1991 with a bachelor's degree in electronics engineering and went to work for the Department of the Army in its night-vision laboratories, where I worked mostly on contract agreements for development of specific cameras. My supervisor kept wanting to put me through all these classes so I could continue to move up, but I'm an active person and don't like to sit around. I was already familiar with firefighting because I had been a volunteer firefighter since I was in college, so I decided — you know what? — it's time to switch careers.

I enrolled in a two-year fire science program at a local community college and began to go through the written and physical testing process to be hired as a professional firefighter. I got job offers at the same time from the City of Fairfax and the County of Fairfax in northern Virginia. It was a big decision, but ultimately I decided to go with the smaller, two-station, 65-person city department. It's a family environment. We all know each other and see each other more often, as compared to the larger county department, which has 41 stations.

I was just the second woman hired by my department. One thing I learned is, never say you can do something you cannot do. I understand my limitations and was not afraid to ask for help or clarification. The guys respected that.

Courtesy of Andrea Clark

Clark's work schedule as a firefighter allows her more time for her children, Benjamin and Kendall, ages 3 and 8 in this 2005 photo.

I love being a firefighter because every call is different, whether we're answering an emergency medical services call, a fire alarm, or actually going to fight a structure fire. It's a very physical job. But I've always been a physically fit, active person and played sports when I was growing up, so staying active has kept me interested in the job.

This is an inherently dangerous job, but that's usually not the first thing that crosses my mind. If I crawl into a building that's on fire or we go to a car fire, to me it's exciting.

In my 15 years with the department, I've moved up through the ranks. I started as a firefighter, became a paramedic, and after that I became a lieutenant and spent five years as a fire marshal. I inspected city buildings to make sure they were in compliance with the fire code. When there was a fire, I would investigate and determine if it was accidental or purposely set. I had police powers to make an arrest if necessary.

In the meantime, I had two children, now 11 and 6, and I decided I needed to go back to shift work so I could spend more quality time with my family. A captain position opened up, and that's where I am now. That means I am station supervisor when I am on shift. I work a 24-hour shift, then have 24 hours off, and cycle that over five days. Then I have a four-day break. I can often take my kids to school and pick them up, and we do things in the afternoon. It's easy to visit their school.

I'm 40 years old now, and I'm very happy with what I'm doing. I hope to retire at age 50 with 25 years service. The next step in my career would be battalion chief, a job that can include commanding a fire scene or accident scene. I don't want to be in that position yet, but in five years it might be different.

When people ask me about making a career change, I tell them, go with your heart. If you don't like what you're doing, you're not going to want to go to work every day. I took a $15,000 pay cut when I made the switch, but then money didn't mean anything to me. I wanted to be happy. I was only 25 and had no children, so I also had the time and energy to pursue a new career.

I don't always feel fulfilled when I go home from a shift. Certainly, we don't always have fires to fight. But there are days when we deliver a baby, or save the life of a man who is having a heart attack, or simply provide sand bags to a woman scared that her house will flood during a storm. That woman was so grateful that she gave me a tearful hug and later sent a wonderful thank-you note. That's why I do what I do. ■

Getting to College

Courtesy of College Summit

Students involved in the College Summit program write personal statements to strengthen their college applications.

A growing U.S. organization is working to help young people get into college.

Here's one of life's really big questions: How or where do you find success in life? And what is it anyway?

Philosophers and advice gurus might spin all kinds of answers, but there's one really easy answer for somebody who is 16 or 17 years old in the United States: college.

U.S. government surveys show that a person who has a college degree will earn $1 million more over a lifetime, on average, than a person who has a secondary school diploma.

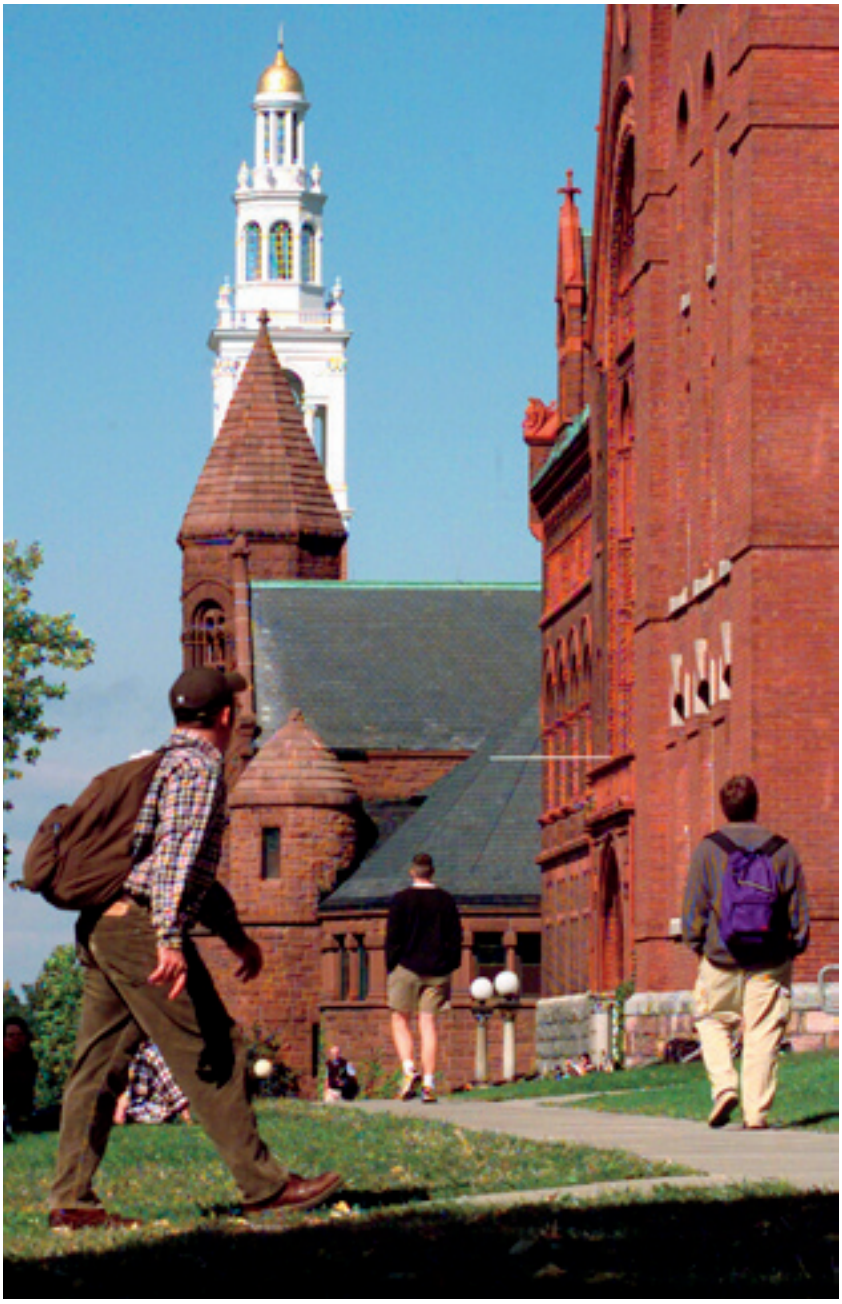
The answer may be easy, but then comes the hard part. How do you get into college? Which one do you pick? Which one will pick you? How do you pay for it?

Just getting into college takes a lot of work and research. Most young people who do it successfully have a parent guiding them and prodding them along the way.

But parents who didn't go to college have a disadvantage as they try to push their kids toward college. And the kids in those families often don't see themselves as college-bound, even when their grades are good enough for admission.

That's the job College Summit has taken on. It's a nonprofit organization that started out 15 years ago when four teens in a low-income neighborhood in Washington, D.C., went to a counselor at a community center and asked for help getting into college. That counselor was J.B. Schramm, and today College Summit is working with secondary schools in 10 U.S. states, serving 17,000 senior-level students who need a boost getting into college.

With a special focus on students from low-income backgrounds, College Summit works with students throughout the senior year to reach all college admission deadlines. An equally important part of the program is helping secondary schools build a college-going culture among all their students. The organization's leaders figured



© AP Images/Toby Talbot, File

Students on the campus of the University of Vermont in Burlington, Vermont.

College Summit employs one strategy used in the military in getting students ready to propel themselves toward college: boot camp. In military-speak, boot camp is an intensive period of basic training in which civilians learn to be soldiers. For College Summit, boot camp is a four-day period of immersion in which instructors help young people see beyond a high school diploma and envision themselves as college students, and even as college graduates.

As College Summit has demonstrated its success and moved into broader partnerships with schools and school districts, the goal is to establish higher expectations in secondary schools. While the high school diploma has long been a goal in itself, College Summit and its partner schools want students to look at secondary school as only the launching pad for further achievement.

In order for seniors to see college as the next step following graduation, College Summit schools put tools and curriculum in the hands of all students to navigate the postsecondary planning process. College Summit and partner schools build time for those activities into the school day and provide training so educators can provide counseling and encouragement for students' college aspirations.

The College Summit philosophy is not that all students may choose a university, but that students shouldn't lose the chance because a secondary school program didn't prepare them.

"Our goal is to have every student find the path that makes sense for them," Schramm said, "whether it's a four-year college, a two-year degree, the military, or occupational certification." ■

out that when kids see other kids go on to college — kids a lot like themselves — everybody begins to believe they have a shot at making it.

That ripple effect sets in motion huge waves, says Schramm.

"The young person who is the first in his family to get a college degree has basically ended poverty in his or her family line forever," said Schramm, the founder and chief executive officer of this organization.

The organiztion's Web site is http://www.collegesummit.org

Open Your Eyes

Eldon Harmon

Photo by Frank Abbruzzese/ Courtesy of Deloitte LLP

Essayist Eldon Harmon is pursuing a successful career with an international corporation after raising his aspirations in the College Summit program.

A successful young professional recalls a decisive moment in his life when College Summit showed him how to look for opportunities to move past secondary school graduation, on to college, and into a career.

Eldon Harmon is now a consultant at Deloitte LLP, one of the world's leading professional services organizations, where he works in the Enterprise Risk Services practice. Harmon is also a volunteer at College Summit, working with young people in search of their future.

My mom was a single parent who wanted the best life for her sons, and she gave us all the love and support possible. There was a possibility that we could encounter violence and drugs around every corner, so raising two boys in East New York, a section of the Brooklyn borough of New York City, is no easy task. Her commitment to provide for us and protect us from our environment remains a very clear memory for me. She was a wonderful influence on us growing up, but when it came to planning what to do after high school, she had limited experience with the college application process.

In high school, my grades were average and I wasn't sure what I wanted to do next. With a ratio of about 500 students to every one college guidance counselor at my school, I wasn't getting a lot of help in researching the options that might be open to me. Leading up to my senior year in 1997, I heard about College Summit, and I agreed to attend their summer writing workshop because it offered the opportunity to get out of my neighborhood in Brooklyn for a few days during the hot summer. And I wanted to see what the program was about, including what it would feel like to be on a college campus.

I arrived at Connecticut College, not knowing what to expect. The first night, we had a "rap session," which was an opportunity for us to talk about the obstacles we saw standing in the way of getting into college. Many of the other kids were like me: They would be the first in their families to go to college. During the session, we really had to open up about what our hopes and fears were for the future and the challenges we had faced in the past.

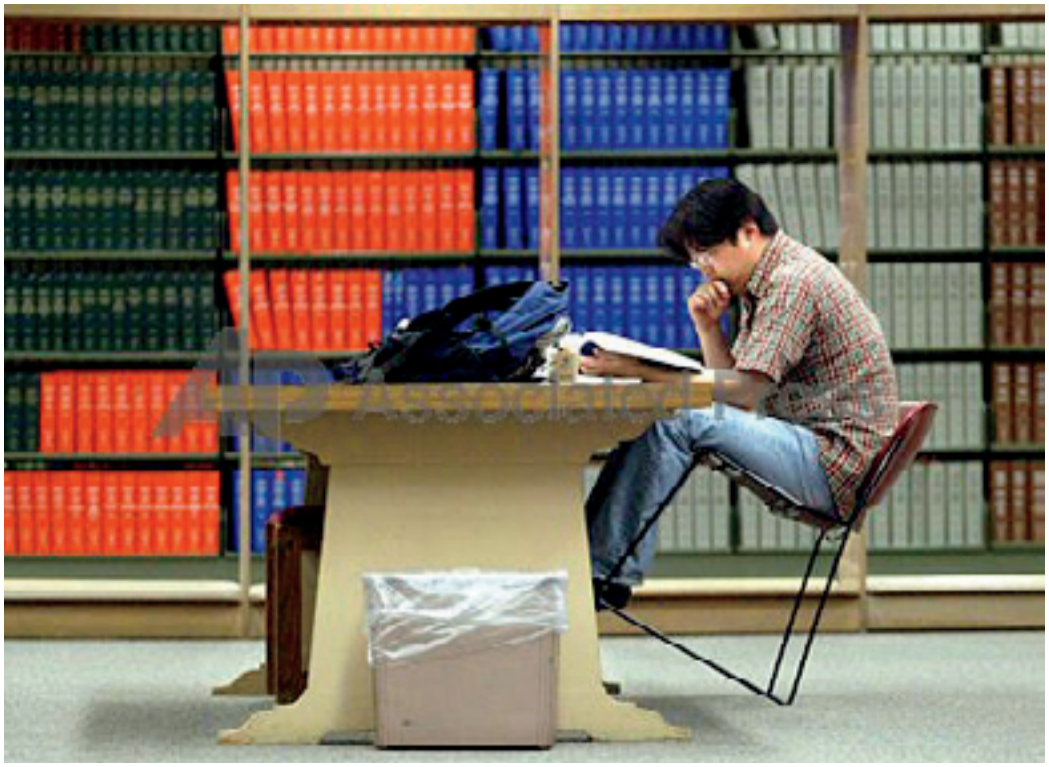
Gathered together that first night of the workshop, what struck me most was our rap director's telling us to open our eyes and see that we were actually privileged to be in a position to go to college. Generations of people before us couldn't have dreamed of the opportunities that were within our reach. I had never thought of myself as privileged, but when the rap director explained it so clearly, I understood I had a responsibility to work hard and do my best.

My level of optimism about the future changed at that moment. After that night, my thinking changed dramatically. Before then, I mostly focused on just getting by or doing what needed to be done. After that night, I wanted to prove that I was above average, maybe even a leader. The possibility of going on to college and attaining a great career finally seemed more of a reality. It motivated me to get through the college application process and begin vigorously interviewing with various colleges.

Returning to high school for my senior year, I felt lucky to have a jump start on what I needed to do to get into college. I applied and was accepted to the

Environmental Science and Forestry program at the State University of New York for my undergraduate degree. I went on to pursue a master's degree in telecommunications management at Syracuse University.

At first, college was difficult. I felt academically behind and at times thought about giving up. My plan was just to study hard to catch up, but I quickly learned there was more to success than working on my own. I needed to get involved and become a part of the academic community, join study groups and other clubs so I could learn from others to improve myself. That is a lesson that has stayed with me till this day.



A student crams for final exams at the University of Idaho library.

© AP Images/*Moscow-Pullamn Daily News*, Geoff Crimmins

Now I work at Deloitte as a consultant who helps large organizations deal with security risks, and it's a huge coincidence that the company I joined — Deloitte — provides monetary and pro bono services to College Summit. Its employees are encouraged to contribute their skills as well. I had been with the company for only a few months when I learned this, and the knowledge of its relationship with the organization that helped me so many years earlier solidified that Deloitte was the right place for me. The relationship between the two organizations is so strong that Deloitte is College Summit's largest source of corporate volunteers. Last summer I volunteered as a counselor at a College Summit workshop and worked one-on-one with 14 students.

As the students walked through the door, I thought back to my own experience of having no idea where I wanted to go, and no clue on why I should put in the effort. I challenged those kids as someone had challenged me. I asked them to open their eyes, to dream big about what they could do if anything in the world was possible. These big-idea conversations helped us identify what was important to them and their futures so we could work together to find the colleges that fit their needs.

Being a College Summit alumnus really helped me to relate to my students. Not only was I able to see a lot of myself in them, but I think they were able to see some of themselves in me, as they kept saying "if he could do it, so can we." I hope that young people considering what to do after high school consider my story and know that opportunities are there and waiting if they just open themselves up and work hard to seize them. ■

A Journey of Revisions

Maggie Leffler

Courtesy of Katherine Brown

The author appears at a book-signing upon the release of her first book.

Choosing a career is hard. Choosing two careers must be harder. But this essayist writes that choosing to be both a novelist and a physician was the only choice that seemed right.

Dr. Maggie Leffler is a physician, practicing family medicine in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Her first novel, The Diagnosis of Love*, was published in 2007. Her second novel,* The Goodbye Cousins*, will be released in June 2009.*

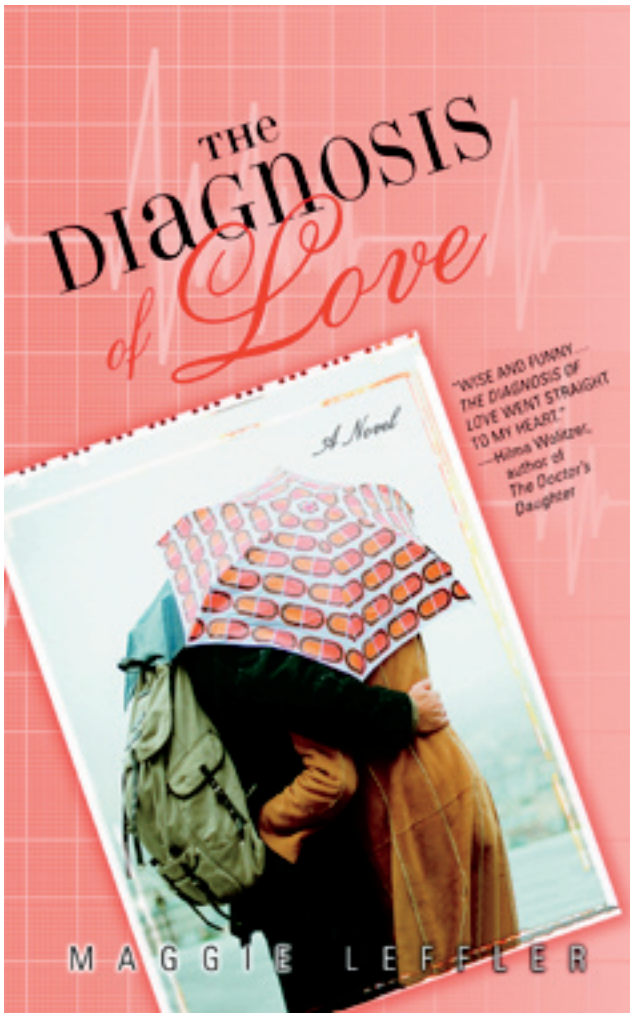
I have a distinct memory of Career Day at my elementary school: the nine-year-old, pig-tailed me raising a hand and volunteering that I wanted to be a doctor and a writer. My dream was met with more disbelief than that of the boy who hoped to play baseball for the Baltimore Orioles [a professional team].

My mother and father were physicians, my grandmother was a novelist, and at an early age I'd been inspired to do both. Later on, after the death of my parents, I realized the two professions were linked by my own looming mortality. I wanted to save myself and my loved ones by acquiring medical knowledge, but I also wanted to write something that would live longer than I would. In time, I just hoped to reach people while I had the chance. This was the most powerful motivation calling me to medicine and is probably the most powerful motivation that compels me to write.

From the time I learned to read, I loved to put my own words on paper, forming my own small truths into a story. As an elementary school student, I started writing with what I called "The Big Five" short stories, modeled after a less-dysfunctional version of my family. In middle school, I moved on to Judy Blume-inspired novellas; in high school, I wrote a screenplay; and the year after I graduated from the University of Delaware, I finished my first unpublished novel. I cannot remember a time in my life when I wasn't writing.

Medicine, on the other hand, was a conscious decision that presented me with two large obstacles: science and standardized tests. The former — including chemistry, physics, and organic chemistry — did not come easily to me. The latter — including Medical College Achievement Tests [MCATs] — actually induced panic attacks and palm-sweating so profuse that, in the days before computerized board exams, I found it hard to even hold a pencil. Despite this, I pressed on through the required "weed-out" courses, through 16 weeks of summer school hell, and through MCAT review classes. In the fall of my senior year of college, I applied to medical school.

Backpacking through Austria that spring, I used a youth hostel pay phone to call home, only to learn that



Courtesy of Bantam Dell

After years of work, Leffler's first novel was released in 2007 by Bantam Dell.

I'd been rejected from the 27 medical schools where I had applied. Maybe I'd focused too much on American literature during college; maybe I hadn't appeared scientific enough.

Somehow, my mother spun the grim facts into an opportunity: "Now is your chance to really dream. What would you do if you could do anything?" she asked over miles of telephone wire. "I want to write books that people will read and re-read," I said. I was really thinking, "I would be a doctor."

It was time to get my first "serious job": at the University of Maryland doing bench work in a windowless lab that I secretly called "The Dungeon." Under the direction of my principal investigator, I performed lab techniques — measuring the micrometers traveled by proteins separated by a gel, all the while feeling as if I were measuring the minutes of my own life. During the downtime, as we waited for reagents to boil or timers to go off, I was busy writing. Soon, the principal investigator gave up asking me about medical school and instead just asked about my novel, which I took as a sign of double failure. After all, I'd sent out even more query letters to literary agents than applications to medical school. None of the agents were interested in reading my manuscript, much less representing me. It seemed possible that I could spend my life writing words that no one would read and pursuing a profession that no one wanted me to enter.

Six months later, on a cold January day, I got on a plane for the island of Grenada to start at St. George's University, an off-shore medical school that dared to let me in, and — equally astonishing — that I had dared to attend. Life in a developing world country was a time of discovery, the most important one: that I was smart, something I'd been doubting in the months since I received my undergraduate degree. At St. George's, I got the idea for a new book, which I finished before graduation. During my family practice residency in Pittsburgh, I rewrote the novel — and then rewrote it again once I got out in private practice. The year that my son was born, *The Diagnosis of Love*, was picked up for publication.

These years in the hospital have taught me that writing and medicine are not so very different. Every day, patients privilege me with rambling stories, which I sift through for the important points, constrained by my job to sacrifice the details I love for the ones that really matter to the story of their condition. I'm honored to be the necessary ghost editor for their histories.

It has been a journey of revisions — both in my own stories and in my personal expectations: I never planned on leaving the country to become a doctor, but it did give me something to write about. And in the medical profession, as in writing, revisions of thought and ideas never end. Each day, choices are made: What outdated concepts can I let go of; what can I keep? Medicine is about refinement of an elusive ideal; in writing, there is always another draft.

I have become what I wanted to be when I grew up, but I am still becoming. ■

Additional Resources

Books, articles, Web sites, and films on choosing a career

Books

Bolles, Mark E. and Richard N. Bolles. *Job-Hunting Online: A Guide to Job Listings, Message Boards, Research Sites, the UnderWeb, Counseling, Networking, Self-Assessment Tools, Niche Sites*, 5th ed. Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press, 2008.

Bolles, Richard N., Carol Christen, and Jean M. Blomquist. *What Color Is Your Parachute? For Teens: Discovering Yourself, Defining Your Future*. Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press, 2006.

Brooks, David. *On Paradise Drive: How We Live Now (and Always Have) in the Future Tense*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2004.

Danziger, Sheldon and Cecilia E. Rouse, eds. *The Price of Independence: The Economics of Early Adulthood*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation, 2007. *http://www.princeton.edu/pr/pwb/08/0505/econ/*

Erickson, Tamara J. *Plugged In: The Generation Y Guide to Thriving at Work*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press, 2008.

Fields, Bea, ed. *Millennial Leaders: Success Stories from Today's Most Brilliant Generation Y Leaders*. New York, NY: Morgan James, 2008.

Gavin, Michelle D., ed. *A Work in Progress: The Prospects and Potential of the World's Youth*. New York, NY: International Debate Education Association, 2008.

Howe, Neil and William Strauss. *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*. New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2000.

Huntley, Rebecca. *The World According to Y: Inside the New Adult Generation*. Crows Nest, New South Wales, Australia: Allen and Unwin, 2006.

The Millennials: Americans Born 1977 to 1994, 3rd ed.; by the *New Strategist* editors. Ithaca, NY: New Strategist Publications, 2006.

Pink, Daniel H. *The Adventures of Johnny Bunko: The Last Career Guide You'll Ever Need*. New York, NY: Riverhead Books, 2008.

Pink, Daniel H. *A Whole New Mind: Moving from the Information Age to the Conceptual Age*. New York, NY: Riverhead Books, 2005.

Sutherland, Anne and Beth Thompson. *Kidfluence: The Marketer's Guide to Understanding and Reaching Generation Y: Kids, Tweens, and Teens*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 2003.

Books by Contributors

Rennicke, Jeff. *Treasures of Alaska: Last Great American Wilderness*; photographs by Michael Melford. Washington, DC: National Geographic, 2001.

Scheib, Walter and Andrew Friedman. *White House Chef: Eleven Years, Two Presidents, One Kitchen*. Hoboken, NJ: J. Wiley, 2007.

Articles

"Briefing Strategies: Generation Y: Marketing to the Young Ones (18-26s)," *Euromonitor International*, September 2007. *http://www.euromonitor.com/Generation_Y_Marketing_To_The_Young_Ones_(18_26S)*

Brooks, David. "The Organization Kid," *Atlantic Monthly*, vol. 287, no. 4 (April 2001): pp. 40-54.

Farrell, Andrew. "The World's Richest Dropouts," *Forbes*, June 30, 2008. *http://www.forbes.com/businessbillionaires/2008/06/30/billionaires-education-college-biz-billies-cx_*af_0630billiedropouts.html

Internet Resources

Government

Americorps
The national youth service program.
http://www.americorps.gov

Career Voyages
A joint effort of the U.S. Department of Labor and the U.S. Department of Education offers career-related posters, brochures, and information about occupations and industries.
http://www.careervoyages.gov/index.cfm

EDU411
A U.S. government site that serves as a portal to a variety of information on higher education and career selection.
http://www.edu411.org/programs/
Finding Yourself: Top Personality and Career Tests on the Web
http://www.edu411.org/featured_articles/Finding_Yourself:_Top_Personality_and_Career_Tests_on_the_Web/

O*NET Resource Center
The Occupational Information Network (O*NET), a government-sponsored site, offers a broad range of information about occupations.
http://www.onetcenter.org/links.html

Associations

Association of Career Professionals International
This association specializes in all aspects of career services, including career management and transition, assessments, coaching, talent retention, and organizational consulting.
http://www.iacmp.org/index.html

College Summit
This nongovernmental organization works to give promising but underprivileged high school students a boost into adult life by sponsoring college boot camps, coaching them, and preparing them for application, selection, and financial aid.
http://www.collegesummit.org/

EdVenture Partners
This organization provides real-world professional marketing experience to college students by partnering with actual corporate/government/organizational clients.
http://www.edventurepartners.com

National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE)
NACE connects employers with schools and students and does extensive surveying of college students.
http://www.naceweb.org

Universum
With a focus on marketing and branding, this company does an annual survey of college seniors in the U.S. and around the world to determine trends in employment choice.
http://www.universumglobal.com

Filmography

Clerks (1994)
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0109445/
Producer: Miramax Films
Synopsis: A day in the lives of two convenience store clerks named Dante and Randal as they annoy customers, discuss movies, and play hockey on the store roof.
Running time: 89 minutes

Glengarry Glen Ross (1992)
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0104348/
Producer: New Line Cinema
Synopsis: An examination of the machinations behind-the-scenes at a real estate office.
Running time: 100 minutes

The Graduate (1967)
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0061722/
Producer: Embassy Pictures
Synopsis: Recent college graduate Benjamin Braddock searches for direction in life and becomes ensnared in romantic entanglements.
Running time: 105 minutes

Ladder 49 (2004)
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0349710/
Producer: Touchstone Pictures
Synopsis: Under the watchful eye of his mentor, a probationary firefighter matures into a seasoned veteran at a Baltimore, Maryland, fire station.
Running time: 114 minutes

Working Girl (1988)
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0096463/
Producer: 20th Century Fox
Synopsis: When a secretary's idea is stolen by her boss, she seizes an opportunity to steal it back by pretending she has her boss's job.
Running time: 113 minutes

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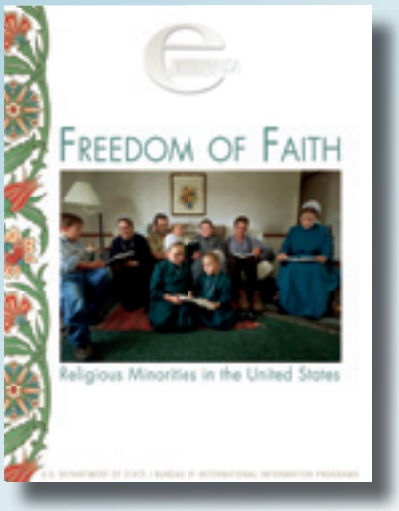
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