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Reality 101: The Job Hunting Class You Didn't Take

By Janet White

It's the final stretch of your senior year, and you're chomping at the bit. It's just a matter of months now until you're out of school, so you're gearing up for what's next. If graduate school isn't on the immediate horizon, chances are you'll be looking for your first real job, and think your job search will go something like this:

Sensing your enormous potential, companies compete to hire you, each, offering a lucrative salary and benefits package, a job with a fancy title, challenging work and a secure future.

You are promised a solid, exciting career path in which you are trained, nurtured and mentored, promoted to ever-increasing levels of responsibility and groomed to achieve the highest levels of success in your chosen field.

Dream on. They probably never told you this in your resume writing classes or career placement office, but your major has a great deal to do with your ability to get not just a good job, but any job right out of school:

Undergraduates in accounting, math, finance, science, computers, sales or other professions, and those coming out of graduate programs in law, health, education, business and engineering usually have an easier time getting hired because their course work has made them "work-ready."

If you're in this group, chances are your skills are in such hot demand that you have your pick of employers. Many companies in these fields actively recruit entry-level trainees, keeping them busy with low-level assignments while they determine which ones to keep for a while. Those that don't make the cut won't have to look long or far for another company.

Liberal arts majors and others who didn't major in the sciences or business usually have a much different experience in finding their way into the world of working for a living.

If you're in this group, you probably have a hazy idea about what you want to do for a living for the next few years, have few or no practical work skills, and turn up your nose at boring, routine and low-paying entry-level jobs.

No matter how much you think you're worth, what your potential is, or how unfair it is that everyone else seems to get great jobs while you're slugging it out at McDonald's, here are some facts of life to consider that you probably didn't learn in college:

- Once you're out of college, your grade point average, extra curricular activities, coursework, internships and/or volunteer work and your "Who's Who in American Colleges and Universities" are absolutely irrelevant.
- Unless you attended a vocational or community college or were in a program that provided hands-on training in a real-world environment, little of what you studied may be applicable since coursework does not count as experience.
- You will not get hired because you are trainable; you will get hired because you are already trained in the fundamentals of your work.
- If you are not trained in the fundamentals of your work during college, you will have to acquire viable work skills by attending a community college, technical or vocational school, either during or after college.
- Without viable work skills, you will probably only get hired for boring, entry-level jobs that pay just-over-broke salaries because you don't know enough yet to qualify for anything else.
- Having such skills will get you a "job" that covers the bills, puts food on the table, pays the rent, and enables you to say you're on your own as an adult.
- A succession of jobs within a specific industry, which may or may not have anything to do with each other, is called a "career." A job can last months or years; a career can last years or decades.
- Most people do not get jobs in the field they majored in, do not stay with one company for a long period of time, and will switch careers at least once.
- With time and training, you can move up and onward to positions of greater responsibility, but first do whatever it is you are being paid to do at those dull and mind-numbing jobs, and learn what you need to know to move on.
- Each job provides opportunities to learn something, so be a sponge. Regardless of how trivial or insignificant you may consider what you're doing, it's important to the company that's paying you, so make it important to you. You never know; what you learn could prove invaluable to you one day.

- While many people will influence you and some may even play the role of “mentor” in some fashion, no one will take you by the hand, guide your career, shield you from your own mistakes or lead you down the primrose path to success.

As an adult, you alone will be responsible for deciding what personal and/or professional paths you should pursue, what steps you’ll need to take to get there, and what sacrifices you’ll have to make in order to achieve your goals.

New graduates, congratulations on getting your degree. Your education has just begun.