

A new approach to job search strategy

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There is plenty of career advice floating around. A quick Google search for the term turned up 248,000,000 results in less than a second. Most of it follows the conventional wisdom. Today, though, I'm going to pass on some advice that goes against conventional wisdom.

WORK FIRST, COLLEGE LATER

Unless you have a specific career in mind, you're probably wasting time going straight to college after high school. According to a CNBC report, the average cost of attending a four-year private university is now nearly \$42,500 per year — triple the price tag in 1990 and the equivalent, after taxes are taken out, of almost a year's income for a median household today.

In addition, studies show that only 36.5 percent of students at public, four-year universities have obtained a degree after five years. Students who drop out often wind up with unpaid debt and nothing to show for it.

At the same time, earnings for college graduates have dropped, and the value of a four-year degree has dropped as well. You can find plenty of work without a degree, and experience in the workplace will help you decide what your strengths are and what you enjoy doing. You'll learn how to manage a budget, balance work with life and figure out what's important to you.

Eventually, you can start college with a better idea of what kind of work you want to do. You might find that a 2-year degree or certification will be enough to advance your career. You might also find that your employer is willing to help pay for your education. Either way, having a clear career goal will help you make more efficient choices about how you invest in education.

P.S.: If you're considering graduate school right after college, read the above paragraphs again, but double the debt.

FORGET ONLINE JOB ADS

When searching the internet for a job, the odds are actually stacked against you. Recent studies indicate that only 3 percent of candidates get an interview from an online job posting. Worse, spending time searching and applying online feels productive, so you can waste hours each day that you should be spending on expanding your network. You know, meeting real humans in the real world.

It's still true that your best chance of getting the next job is through your network. A recent Jobvite survey stated that 60 percent of employers' best candidates come through referrals. If your network is small or needs work, you'll have to get out there and meet more people. You can do that through attending industry events and functions, volunteering, or joining alumni, business and interest groups in person and yes, even being active online at LinkedIn. Although finding the right job online is a long shot, being found online by a recruiter is much more likely.

DON'T WORRY ABOUT JOB HOPPING

It's true that staying at least a year in a job demonstrates that you gave it a fair chance; you won't usually feel competent until you've been doing the work for a few months. But you can consider your early jobs to be part of your education.

Stay, learn and thrive if you can, but don't stay after you become bored. Your performance will begin to suffer, and it won't be long before your manager starts wondering why you don't leave. It's better to make an exit while you're still valued.

Job hopping is how you prepare for a career position, just as dating is a part of becoming ready to get married. Contrary to popular belief, millennials didn't invent job hopping.

A 2015 study by the Bureau of Labor Statistics found that the average person born in the latter years of the baby boom (1957-1964) held 11.7 jobs from age 18 to age 48. Nearly half of these jobs were held from ages 18 to 24. Job hopping is a function of youth and self-discovery, not a symptom of lack of character.

Now that your thinking on the "right" way to job search has been disrupted, go out there and break some rules.

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"If you are doing what everyone else is doing, there is probably not an opportunity there." — George Kaiser