

Wisconsin Park & Recreation Association

Career Center Tips: **Students: Pick a Career Instead of a Job!**



I will never forget how lost I felt the summer after my graduation from college, and in the 30 plus years since, I've spoken to countless 20-somethings who feel incredibly pressured to find their true calling immediately and build a successful career in a particular field before their 25th birthdays.

A more realistic challenge is to ease yourself slowly into the work world by following a few strategies that many people don't try until they're well into their 30s. School probably taught you a lot of things, but the business world's unique set of rules may not have been part of the story. Hopefully these tips will get you started on the right foot:

Pick a Career Instead of a Job

Looking for a job haphazardly, because you majored in something or because you saw a listing that looks somewhat interesting, you'll risk getting started in a career that holds no real appeal for you, and then you'll have to leave it to find something else. Why not plan your career strategically, just like you planned your education? Start by doing a self-assessment that teaches you things about yourself that you might never have thought about -- for example, what you like and don't like in a work environment, what defines success for you, and what type of work would make you want to sit in traffic for hours just for the privilege of showing up. Knowing these things can help you determine which occupations could be a good fit for you.

If You Can't Get a Job Right Away, Don't Despair

If you start thinking of yourself as a victim or allow yourself to lapse into prolonged negativity, you won't be hurting anyone except yourself. Worrying until you get sick, abusing drugs or denying that you've reached an impasse won't help either. The best strategy for moving on is to recognize the reality of the situation, acknowledge your feelings and find a way to cope productively. Reach out to your support systems, and consider taking some time off -- after all, you'll never have the freedom of being between school and work again!

Network Like Mad in Your Chosen Field

A huge percentage of job openings aren't advertised because employers prefer to hire people through word of mouth. Developing relationships with people working in your field, then, means that you're top of mind whenever they hear of a new opportunity. We continually stress the importance of students attending the WPRA Annual Conference, especially because of the networking that can take place, as well as leads for internship placements and job opportunities. Learn about new contacts by researching firms in your industry, joining social networking sites like LinkedIn, asking your parents' friends, and joining relevant professional associations. Approach individuals by e-mail first, and don't put them on the defensive by asking for a job outright. Instead, show curiosity about their career path and see if they'll agree to lunch or coffee.

Hone Your Reputation as a Can-Do, Enthusiastic Employee

Don't have a sense of entitlement -- your company isn't responsible for your career growth: you are. Only approach your boss with a problem or complaint if you've explored all options for resolving it yourself. When you do, be prepared with a solution you could implement with her help. The words I don't have time should never escape your lips. If you know something needs to be done, do it without being prodded. Your boss will quickly come to see you as someone she can count on and a huge asset to the team. If you have conflicting priorities, ask your boss to help sort them out.

Don't Think of Your First Job as the Be All, End All to Career Stardom

How can you master the skills it takes to get ahead without putting any time in the trenches? That's like saying you could win an Olympic medal in swimming without learning to doggie paddle first. Look at your first post-college positions as temporary stops on your career path instead of permanent ones. Don't be in such a rush to get promoted either -- you have a long career life ahead of you to shoulder the heavy burden of being

on top. In the meantime, enjoy getting paid to learn everything you can so that snagging your next job isn't quite as challenging!