

**Graduate to a  
GREAT  
JOB**

**Make Your  
College Degree Pay Off  
in TODAY'S Market**

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**DAVID DeLONG**

Graduate to a Great Job: Make Your College Degree Pay Off in Today's Market  
by David DeLong

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# Introduction

In case you haven't noticed, it's very hard for today's graduates to get a great job coming out of college. This is especially true for students graduating with liberal arts degrees.

What does it take to land a great job? Ask grads who've done it, and most will tell you, "You'd be surprised."

## **"I Should Be You!"**

She was working the lunch shift in a busy Pittsburgh beer bar when the call came. Laura took the phone from her apron and glanced around at the ten tables she was covering. The caller ID indicated it was a prominent technology company where she had recently interviewed. She was afraid to get her hopes up as she ran to the bathroom to take the call.

Since graduating from Lehigh University more than two years ago, Laura had applied for at least 100 jobs where she might use the writing skills from her journalism degree. But all she had to show for her efforts was an endless string of rejections and four waitressing jobs. She recalls:

*I was so frustrated with the whole process. You work so hard. You do everything right. I was sick of waiting on tables. At happy hour I'd wait on people my own age who looked successful, and I'd think, "I should be you!"*

Then in a moment, she was. Standing in the ladies room of that Pittsburgh bar, the cell phone pressed to her ear, Laura finally got what she had been waiting for—a job offer from a company she really wanted to work for. She remembers the moment clearly:

*I did everything my Dad said not to do. He always told me to look over an offer first. But once I heard that I had the job, I didn't even listen to what the person was saying. I accepted right away. I walked back onto the floor and shouted, "I got a job!" I looked at my manager and said, "I'm quitting in two weeks." He smiled and said, "You gotta finish your shift first."*

## **Things Didn't Go as Planned**

Carl had moved to Minneapolis to be with his girlfriend a few months after graduating from Colorado College with an economics degree. He was confident he'd land a job soon, even though he had limited experience, no prospects, and no network in his new city.

*I thought I was a hotshot. I had a great internship after my junior year. I had a good resume. But I was delusional about what employers are looking for. People wanted experience, and all I could give them was a motivated, smart recruit. I didn't even know how to prepare for an interview!*

Now, more than a year later, Carl still didn't have a job, despite his extensive networking, interviewing, and looking for opportunities in the finance industry. But things were looking up. He recently had second-round interviews in three large companies. Then one morning he got a call from a prominent investment management firm. Carl remembers:

*The guy on the phone said they wanted to make me a job offer. I was speechless. It had been such a long time. I was thrilled because I didn't think I connected that well with my interviewer there. I accepted the offer immediately and began thinking about all the people I'd have to thank. I knew now the networking would never stop.*

## Screaming in Spokane

It was a beautiful summer evening in Spokane. Maria and her fiancé, Jeff, had his parents over for dinner on the patio in the backyard. Since graduating from nearby Eastern Washington University over a year ago, she had developed an excellent reputation as a substitute teacher. Still, Maria was unable to find a full-time position. Recently, she had interviewed for a first-grade teaching job, the last opening for the coming school year in Spokane. More than 400 people had applied, and she was one of only four candidates interviewed. Her phone rang during dinner. Maria recalls:

*I loved teaching, but I was thinking I didn't go to school for four years to be a substitute teacher. I was burned out on subbing. Then the principal is on the phone and she asks me if I got the message she left two hours ago. She said they wanted to offer me the position. And, you know, suddenly I'm screaming, standing in the back yard, jumping up and down! I'm trying to be professional, but I finally had a teaching job. I called my Mom right away. It was a great moment.*

## Time to Start Writing Your Own Happy Ending

Succeeding in today's job market means knowing what works—and what doesn't. Despite all the bad news in the media and the negative talk among your friends and parents, remember this: *almost half of new college grads are getting jobs they feel good about after finishing school!* The purpose of this book is to make sure you end up in that group of graduates who feel good about how their career is starting out. OK, maybe you won't have the "perfect" job, but it'll be a good beginning.

This book is based on real-life case studies. Every lesson, every piece of advice was gleaned from or verified by more than 30 recent college grads I interviewed who successfully landed their first job. In

a few cases, the journey was relatively short. In most cases, it was incredibly long and difficult. But every story ended well. (All names have been disguised.)

This book is designed to give you—and your parents—hope. You *can* get a good job! Laura, Carl, and Maria all landed fine jobs, eventually. **Your story will have a happy ending, too, if you follow the strategies and tactics used by this group of creative, persistent, and proactive young grads.**

*Graduate to a Great Job* will help you no matter what your circumstances may be.

- *Are you a junior or senior in college headed into the full-time job market for the first time?* This book is loaded with examples and tips on how to make progress each day to land a job you want.
- *Are you a recent college grad whose job search has stalled or who is back in the job market a few years after graduation?* My research shows that those who get a job quickly after finishing school often find themselves looking again in a year or two. And that second or third job search can be even harder. The lessons learned in this book will show you how to get the traction you'll need to get back in the game—and off your parents' couch.
- *Are you a first- or second-year college student?* Here, you'll find a guide for making smarter decisions through college to set you up for a more productive job search in a couple of years. This advice comes from grads who had fun in college and still succeeded afterwards.
- *Finally, are you a parent whose child fits any of the categories above?* Chapter 18 is written just for you! (I'm the parent of a college student, too, and frankly the entire book is written with a parent's hopes and concerns in mind.) You'll find

loads of ideas about how you can help your children jump-start their career. *Graduate to a Great Job* is a terrific conversation starter and resource that you can share with young adults to give you *both* hope and actionable ideas for getting that great job faster!

## How to Use This Book

*Graduate to a Great Job* gives you lots of practical things you can do immediately. These steps are summarized at the end of most chapters as a “Checklist for Action.”

*How* you read this book—from start to finish, or by choosing topics that are particularly interesting—is up to you. But nothing you read will change your career prospects *unless you take action and start doing things differently!*

Here’s an overview of the chapters. You can decide where to jump in. Need more information on topics like networking, effective online research, or creating resumes? Use the additional links I’ve provided to the most up-to-date resources.

**The Big Picture.** Chapter 1 explains why new college grads must work much harder today to launch their careers. Skip this chapter if you’re already in the middle of a job search and just want practical ideas. But it is important for understanding why finding meaningful work has become such a challenge. You also will see the variety of successful recent grads—their schools, majors, and employers—whose stories are the heart of this book.

**Focusing Your Search.** Chapters 2 and 3 address the most challenging question facing many students today: what kind of work do I want to do? If you can’t answer that question, start here. Chapter 4 provides stories of how two students struggled to figure out what their first jobs should be. If you already know the type of job you want, go to Chapter 5. It shows how to assess yourself against the competition

and will keep you from wasting time applying for positions where you don't have a prayer.

**Building Experience.** Chapters 6-8 explain how to land great internships and make sure they payoff in your post-college job search. Even if you have graduated, check out the section on post-grad internships. Then read Chapter 9 for other ideas about building your experience base.

**Making Connections.** Networking in today's crazy-busy work environment is the most critical skill you'll need to build your career after college. And what if you're an introvert? It's all covered in Chapters 10-12.

**Using Technology.** Can you pass the technology IQ test in Chapter 13? What you don't know about job-search technologies will keep you unemployed today. And Chapter 14 shows how to use particular social media applications so you'll stand out from the other one million-plus new grads this year.

**Selling Yourself.** Landing a great job is about convincing employers that you are the best solution to their problem. Expectations for resumes and job interviews have changed dramatically. Chapters 15 and 16 show how to use these tools to your advantage.

**Career Services.** Chapter 17 explains how to get the most out of your school's career center and offers insights career counselors are afraid to tell you.

**Modern Family.** Chapter 18 shows how Mom and Dad can help you get employed faster without being a pain in the butt.

**Lessons Learned & Happy Endings.** In Chapter 19 recent grads share what they wish they had known before they started their post-college job search. Chapter 20 describes what it will look and feel like to finally land the job you want.

**Special Section: Stories of Search Strategies That Paid Off.** The last section of *Graduate to a Great Job* shows how successful grads worked through specific challenges in their search. Start here if you

like learning from other people's stories about using internships strategically, building effective job search networks, leveraging technology, and nailing a job interview.

This book is intended to give you and your parents the confidence and the tools you need to find meaningful work in today's tough job market. Others have done it. So can you. It won't be easy. In fact, it may be the hardest thing you've ever done, but the rewards will be huge.

**This is your time. It's your life. Go for it!**