

Close Encounters Of The 'Real World' Kind

A Graduate's Perspectives On Working Life

By Wayne Visser

One of my greatest frustrations and apprehensions while at university was not knowing what to expect of the "working netherworld" which would follow. What was a day in the life of a person in my career field like? And was university preparing me adequately for what I would be expected to do? In case you feel the same, here are some of the insights I've gained during my encounters with the "real world out there".

People make the world go round

One of the things I've realised is that much of any job is about working and communicating with people - in meetings, presentations, team assignments and daily personal interactions. The ability to communicate effectively and manage relationships is therefore very important to learn at university, whether in courses or extramurally.

Organisations need their people and activities to be well organised. If your work life is organised, you will find it easier to fit in and to make progress. This requires effective time and diary management, having clear objectives, meeting deadlines and managing people's expectations - and it's valuable to develop these abilities while at university.

Responsibility is another key issue. In fact, in an organisation you will be evaluated largely on the extent to which you are willing and able to take on responsibility. But this shouldn't be too daunting. "Response-ability" is just that: the ability to respond. I have found that simply by responding with enthusiasm to challenges and opportunities outside of my mainstream activities, I can earn the attention and respect of my colleagues. Even at university, taking on a little extra responsibility can aid your future progress.

While my academic learning at university has provided a valuable foundation, what I use continuously at work are the other skills I've developed (largely extramurally) along the way. Get involved! Develop skills! In time, they'll be more valuable than any piece of paper you may have acquired.

Variety is the spice of life

Another lesson I have learned is that in the early stages of one's career, variety really is the spice of life. Don't expect to find exactly the right job first time round.

Although I got a BBusSc in marketing, three of the four jobs I have had since graduating have been in something completely different - banking, accounting and management consulting. It happens that banking and accounting were subjects I avoided like the plague at university... Yet not only have I learned a great deal from the varied experience, I have actually enjoyed all of my jobs immensely!

So I guess the message is: be flexible. Don't restrict your options to the apparent limitations of your degree, because you could just find your career niche somewhere you had at first never dreamed of looking. Try to see past the labels and the titles to the real nature of the opportunities being offered. Follow your heart! Don't be afraid of trying different things.

The warrior is a child

Having said all this, be warned: embarking on your working career may be exciting, but it is hardly like the quest of a knight in shining armour, out to conquer the world. It is more like your first day at school as a child: you feel frightened, hesitant and unconfident. Finding a job can be a traumatic experience. And developing your career will be a slow, sometimes painful process of growing to full maturity. But with perseverance, the reward will be a truly successful and fulfilling career.

I've learned that there are no mathematical formulas for career development. It's more like one gigantic experiment in finding yourself!

Source:

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