

LIFE & STYLE

More Career Advice for Recent Graduates

Wall Street Journal readers join Work & Family columnist Sue Shellenbarger in offering advice to recent college graduates for entering a changing job market

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PHOTO: CAROLE HÉNAFF

Wall Street Journal readers pitched in to help parents advise recent college graduates on launching careers. The conversation began with Sue Shellenbarger's May 6 "Work and Family" column on "The Job Advice You Wish You Knew How to Give."

Although some traditional career paths have vanished and new

types of jobs have sprung up, the fundamentals of supply and demand are unchanged. In written responses to the column, readers recommended researching the market over pursuing one's dream.

"Passion is very overrated for picking a college major," Gary Ayer wrote.

"The very first thing on the list should be determining the jobs you can get with the degree you are working towards: What is the pay, and how does your school rank in graduates getting hired," wrote Frank Orlich. "College is a large investment and requires cost-benefit analysis."



Readers posted links to federal data reflecting soaring student debt and relatively low unemployment for graduates in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, or STEM,

This story was inspired by reader conversation. Add your voice to the discussion.

subjects.
Three-
quarters of
STEM

graduates were employed outside the field of their major, the data showed.

“The best advice parents can give is a reality check on planned majors,” Holly Beum wrote. “Sadly, too many parents ‘don’t want to crush Johnny’s dreams’ even if Johnny has never demonstrated sufficiently high talent for the dream and will incur crushing debt in the attempt.”

Readers counseled choosing in-demand majors such as engineering, information technology, medicine and computer science, but acknowledged that is no silver bullet. “I graduated with a 3.8 GPA in aerospace engineering and couldn’t find anything,” wrote Carson Haack. “I even did extracurricular activities and my own research. My inbox runneth over with rejection letters, and many apps fell on deaf ears.”

Despite earning a master’s degree, Mr. Haack wrote, he had to take a job outside his field. “Aero is a tight, niche industry and connections are king, even for internships,” he said.

Connor Bell had better luck. He graduates this week with a degree in mechanical engineering and has job offers from Fortune 100 companies, including aerospace positions. He quoted annual salaries of \$68,000 to \$75,000. He didn’t go with the highest offer and instead took a position that pays less but is “closer to my family and friends,” Mr. Bell wrote. The job is “in an industry I’ve always cared about, and I have a boss I get along well with and who cares about me. My dad always says that your first boss can make or break you.”

Readers echoed Ms. Shellenbarger’s recommendation to pursue internships and acquire work experience. They advised learning Excel and PowerPoint and taking coding classes in Python and SQL.

Electronic applications increase the competition and make it vital that job-seekers find new ways to stand out. In her column, Ms. Shellenbarger quoted a career coach who said a financial-services company had 14,000 applicants for 100 summer internships. Readers agreed that networking is essential.

Seth Goldhamer said his son referred two former classmates to jobs at his firm. “They need to realize they have a network with their fellow graduates,” Mr. Goldhamer wrote. “Stay in touch with the students who did get jobs. Often the company where they work will have a referral program for new hires.”

John Stahl, 56, advised young people to apply for jobs as golf caddies. “The work may not be relevant to your long-term career, but if you hustle and work hard you will make a decent buck and a good impression on a lot of successful folks,” wrote Mr. Stahl, who lives in New Jersey and works in financial services.

“Work ethic and discipline is just as important as intellect (and oftentimes more important),” wrote Justin Price, a 37-year-old field-procurement supervisor in Pittsburgh. “This was the most important thing I took away from college. I noticed several fellow students who were smarter than me struggling just to pass, due to lack of established work ethic (a.k.a. study habits).”

“LinkedIn, job boards, resumes, and personal networks are just tools,” Jillian Alexander wrote. “Be willing to expand your horizons beyond these and the whole world might open up for you.”

—*Compiled by Anne Michaud*

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