**Case Study Question #1** -- Josh and Pierce have been married for several years and are thinking about having kids. Their goal is to have two kids and they are discussing whether or not Josh should leave his job in order to be a full-time father. Josh is a high school math teacher with a salary of $40,000 a year, and Pierce just got his first job as a full-stack web developer with a technology company making $75,000 a year. Pierce and Josh live in Charlotte, NC and they are both 26 years old. Should Josh leave his job?\* *Support your answer with whatever information you believe to be relevant. Feel free to also make assumptions as long as you mention them in your response.*

First, I’d like to discuss how Josh and Pierce plan on having children. According to the Adoptive Family’s annual survey (2014-2015), the average cost of adopting a child through a private adoption agency is $41,532. Surrogacy comes with an even larger price tag, sometimes hitting the six-figure range. With this information in mind I am going to assume that Josh and Pierce plan on doing a foster adoption through Mecklenburg’s Department of Social Services, which can be free or come with minimal fees. Regarding income, Josh and Pierce currently bring home (after taxes, assuming they file jointly) around $81,582 a year or $6,799 a month. If Josh stays home the family income will come down to $56,014 a year or $4,668 a month. To do the cost analysis of Josh and Pierce’s four-person family, I am going to assume they: live outside of Uptown Charlotte, drive used vehicles, have decent driving records, minimal debt, mostly eat at home, and go out as a family no more than once a week. A simple five-category budget dictates that housing (rent, utilities, etc) should be around 35% of your income, transportation (car payment, insurance, gas, etc) be around 15% of your income, other (variable expenses like groceries, eating out, moving, etc) be around 25% of your income, debt repayment (credit cards, student loans, etc) be around 15% of your income, and you should be saving around 10% of your income. I am going to assume Josh and Pierce keep a decent budget and that they are willing to downsize/cut back if necessary. To assess their specific cost of living in Charlotte I am going to refer to statistics that are Charlotte specific when available and national statistics when necessary. The average rent for a 3-bedroom home outside of center city is around $1,665. The average car payment is around $381 for a used car (going to assume both Josh and Pierce have a vehicle). The average monthly bill for car insurance on a good driving record is around $144 (one person). The average monthly cost of a 4-person family with decent medical coverage is $1,297; assuming some employer contribution, I am going to assume the family only pays a portion of that in the ballpark of around $900. I’m going to combine utilities, internet, and cell-phone bills together with an average of $457 for all three per month. A family of four should spend around $750 a month on groceries. Assuming they drive their vehicles back and forth to work, school, day care, etc, two adults might spend around $250 a month on fuel assuming gas prices are around $2.50/gallon for regular gas. Because I am assuming Josh and Pierce are good with money and have minimal debt, I am assuming their debt repayment is half of what it should be on just Pierce’s income which puts their debt repayment, which includes anything from credit cards to student loans, around $350 a month. What they put into savings will depend on the income, $467 a month if just Pierce is working and $680 a month if they are both working (without assuming Pierce gets raises). If Josh is not able to stay home and child care is needed, they are looking at spending around $1,400 a month for childcare if the children are under school age. Most children in foster care are school-aged children, with many being siblings that do not want to be separated, so childcare needs are a toss-up. I am going to assume the “worst” case scenario of adopting two children under school age when regarding childcare needs. Total expenses if Josh stays home comes to a cost of living at $5,889 per month. If Josh works, the total cost of living comes to $7,502. At their current earnings, the average cost of a four-person family living in Charlotte leaves the family in the red for whether Josh stays home or doesn’t. With this, I am going to assume Josh and Pierce are willing to cut back and save where they can (to better fit a budget based on their income), so I am going to take a generous 10% off the top of their expenses. After cutting back, the cost of a four-person family still comes out to $5,300 per month, which is more than what just Pierce makes on his own right now. If Josh works, their family’s cost of living comes to $6,752 with cutting back. This means they could have children now if they both worked and saved where possible. Seeing as Pierce is making $75k (before taxes) at his first job, it is likely his income will grow soon. Charlotte is listed as number one in tech across the country, with people in the industry bringing home a median salary of 87,755 (before taxes). If Pierce is given a 10% raise every year, he will bring home around 109,807 (before taxes) in five years. If Josh is willing to work until Pierce makes around or more than what they do combined ($115k), Josh could then become a stay at home father. My suggestion would be that Josh continue working until Pierce’s salary reaches the six figure mark, then he could transition into staying at home full-time. (Some sources I used to gather all the numbers: <https://www.numbeo.com/cost-of-living/in/Charlotte> , <https://parkerherringlawgroup.com/adoption/nc-adoption-process/how-much-does-adoption-cost-in-nc/> , <https://www.thebalance.com/try-the-simple-5-category-budget-453622> , <https://www.wraltechwire.com/2018/10/24/charlottes-tech-entrepreneurs-bask-in-glow-of-no-1-tech-town-ranking/> , <https://www.valuepenguin.com/average-cost-of-health-insurance> , <https://www.nerdwallet.com/blog/loans/auto-loans/average-monthly-car-payment/> )

**Case Study Question #2** -- Tell me about an app or a user experience that you really enjoy. What makes it great? How can it be made better?\*

Something that I really enjoy and use every day is Google Assistant. Initially, 4 or 5 years ago when I first got a Google Home, I was very resistant to the idea of it. My ex-husband bought it and I didn’t like the idea of asking this artificial person, if you will, to do things for me I could easily do myself (like check the weather, traffic, set reminders, etc). The idea of using it to play music was palatable to me, but anything else felt odd. Slowly but surely, I warmed up to asking my Google Home what the traffic was like or what the weather was going to be. Next thing I knew I had a Google Home in every major room of my house and was talking more to it than I was anyone else! Google Home/Assistant has become ubiquitous in my house. My phone has a Google Assistant button on it, which has been a God send, you can easily type in a request versus saying “Hey Google, …” out loud, which can be awkward when you’re in public. I can control things in my house like the thermostat and lighting, making me feel like I’ve walked into the 1999 movie Smart House. I can not only assign each Google Home to a room but can assign each Google Home (or supported device) to a group, like “Basement”. So, if I say “Hey Google, turn on the basement lights.” it will only turn on the lights I have assigned to the “Basement” group. Something cool I learned recently is I can make announcements with Google Home, which means it will broadcast what I said on all the Google Home’s in the house. This is useful when I need to ask someone in the kitchen a quick question. It can also set alarms and timers, tell me the weather at home or work, and give me live traffic data for my commute. Mostly, I use my Google Assistant to remind me of things. My job requires that I work in the field, doing in-home visits, which means I’m in my car most of the day. It makes my life a lot easier being able to ask Google Assistant to remind me of what I need to do rather than trying to take the time between appointments to write everything down. It also helps me to my job better. For example, at 3pm every workday Google Assistant reminds me to text my clients to confirm appointments for the next day. This not only helps me stay engaged with clients, but also gives me some time to prepare if people need to reschedule their appointments. Another thing I do a lot is ask my Google Assistant questions, things I would normally pick up my phone to search, but I can just say “Hey Google, …” instead. The Google Home Hub that has a display is very handy when reading recipes, or just casting YouTube videos to when I’m cooking. Usually I’m a pen-to-paper kind of girl, but I’ve become very accustomed to using Google Home/Assistant’s. It would be a difficult transition if I had to live without them. Once I was so ill that I needed to go to the hospital and the only way I could call my emergency contact was with my Google Home! I remember hearing a year or so ago about Google releasing a new project called Google Duplex, which sits inside Google Assistant, that can do things on your behalf like make reservations or book appointments. I remember watching the demo video of Google Duplex in which the AI was making a hair appointment on behalf of the user and the lady who picked up the phone didn’t know she was talking to AI. I’ve heard people argue that technically Google Duplex passed the Turing test (where AI is indistinguishable from intelligent human behavior/linguistic ability) because the lady on the phone didn’t know she was talking to an AI. I’ve seen the option recently to have Google Assistant make reservations on my behalf when googling restaurants on my phone, which is wicked cool. Regarding ways Google Assistant could be made better, I would love to be able to give the Google Assistant a name other than “Google”. I would also like to be able to customize voice commands (like using macros in Word). For example, there isn’t a singular voice command I could use if I want to watch Dr.Phil. videos on YouTube while I’m cooking, but if I could customize “Hey Google, play Dr. Phil” to mean open up YouTube, go to Dr.Phil’s channel, and play the most recent video, that would be useful. There are also a few features that are hard to find so I don’t use them, like the shopping list. It’s easy to tell the Google Assistant what to add to the shopping list, but the actual list itself is buried in the app so finding it to check things off uses any time you’ve saved by using Google Assistant in the first place. I am not a fan of how reminders work despite that being my most-used function with Google Assistant. As it currently stands, each reminder only gets the option of “1 hour” or “Done” when the reminder notification pops up. If you swipe it away it shows up as “overdue” in your list of reminders, but you do not get reminded about it again. This leads to reminders getting backed up sometimes, or reminders that I never saw being overdue because I accidentally swiped them away. It would be helpful if there were better snooze functionality, such as being able to set a snooze frequency (that isn’t just 1 hour), then on the notification card it had a snooze button that would make it come up again in that specified time duration. Or being able to customize what swiping away a reminder notification does so that you don’t end up with a bunch of overdue reminders. I know that despite the giant Google as a company is, there are real people who work on and develop these apps, so I always try to respond when there’s an option to rate how the user experience is and/or leave feedback when I have something specific to add/share.

**Case Study Question #3 -- Make a flyer about the WIN program.\***

*This section is our opportunity to hear about your life, your perspective, and understand who you are as a person. Great responses will clearly communicate a candidate's emotional intelligence and motivation for succeeding in the program.*

**Written Response Question #1** -- Please describe a time you received a piece of personal or professional feedback (positive or negative) and how you responded to that feedback.\*

The most recent and difficult-to-swallow feedback I’ve been given was at work. Lately I’ve been very frustrated at my job, and especially frustrated with one member of my team. My job involves working with individuals who suffer with severe and persistent mental illness overcome their barriers to employment. I am someone who has been receiving behavioral health services (just like my clients) since I was a teenager, so it is hard for me to separate my feelings from my work. The way my service operates is individuals get an Employment Specialist during intake, and an Employment Peer Mentor (me) if they want/need one. Recently I had received complaints from a few of my clients about their Employment Specialist, who is the team member I had a hard time working with, so I had several conversations with my boss about what my clients were expressing to me. After a Monday meeting that got heated between me and my team member, we were requested to have a mediated discussion with my boss and the director of my service. The first meeting was with just me, my boss, and my director. My director is someone I respect greatly, and she is someone who has supported, acknowledged, and rewarded my hard work since I started. During the meeting I was very forward about my frustration and what I thought about my team member. My director listened to my frustration, but pointed out that I’m not doing my job. My job is to provide my clients with a service that helps them overcome their barriers to employment, not to worry about whether my team member is billing correctly or showing up on time. My director pointed out that the tension between me and my team member is palpable, and clients were getting caught in the middle. I honestly wanted to shrink inside myself when I registered what she was telling me. Not only because I was being told I wasn’t doing my job and I needed to do better, but because she was right. I’m not the team lead at this job; I’m a team member. I’m not doing my job if I’m engrossed in whether someone else is doing theirs. I felt embarrassed when I left that meeting, and honestly a little angry, but I knew her point was valid and I had to fix it. In the next meeting with me, my team member, my boss, and my director, I was able to be more honest with why I was frustrated with her because I genuinely wanted to fix things. Not because my frustration with her had lessened, but because I was able to realize the disservice I was doing to my clients. That meeting was probably a month or so ago, and honestly things between the two of us have been a lot easier. We still aren’t friends, and I am still incredibly frustrated with my job, but I put energy into communicating effectively with her and building a better working relationship because that’s what I strongly believe the people we serve (my clients) deserve.

**Written Response Question #2** -- What is the last thing you taught yourself? Why did you choose it and how did you go about learning it?\*

The thing I am currently teaching myself to do is meditate. The last year or so has been incredibly difficult, and despite therapy and medication I still find it hard to regulate my emotions. A few months ago I decided I was going to expand my support network. I was on a mission to find a community where I felt connected and safe. So after talking with my therapist and doing some research online I found this modern Buddhist temple in South End. They were having an open house one afternoon, and me and my girlfriend went to see what it’s about. Technically I’m an Atheist, but Buddhist teachings are in line with the moral code I already live by (vegetarian, pacifism, compassion, etc). We really enjoyed meeting everyone and learning more about Buddhism, so we went back the next day for their class “Advice for a Happy Life”. Before going into this class, I hadn’t realized the importance of meditation to the Buddhist practice. After prayer the teacher invites everyone to mediate (it’s semi-guided) in the beginning of the class and at the end. I had never really meditated before, and the sense of calm I felt really took me by surprise. I’ve read about the effects of mediation and mindfulness but have never been successful with just trying it on my own. After the first class I became very interested in the practice and meditation itself. Meditation isn’t just sitting in silence and trying not to think about anything, it’s really a mental exercise that you must practice to perfect. I’ve been to several classes now and can feel the difference meditation and temple classes have made for my mental health. Getting my mind to slow down is incredibly difficult for me, I’m always go-go-go. Since my mother passed, I haven’t been able to grieve, I’ve just stayed busy since she’s been gone. My therapist tells me I must learn how to sit with my feelings and feel them, which meditation helps me do. I’ve introduced meditative practices into my everyday life and it has helped me stay mindful and listen to my mind/body. This has become crucial for my ability to cope with my mother’s passing. I plan to continue to go to temple to learn how to meditate, as well as visiting classes that are solely about meditation. I learn best by doing. When I find something new that I am interested in I like to jump in feet first. I really enjoy learning and challenging myself to do new things.

**Written Response Question #3** -- How would you explain this program to your family and friends? In what ways are you hoping to grow?\*

This program has been the topic of discussion at my job for the last couple of months, so I have gotten some practice in how I explain it to others. The way I explain this program is this is a competitive program that pays you to learn how to code, and upon successful competition of the program you may be signed up with a sponsor for full-time employment. I explain that this program aims to overcome barriers individuals may face, such as being able to pay their bills while learning a new skill set, so that individuals who normally would not be able to change their career have the opportunity to do so. Once I tell people how much the salary is (after graduation) they are typically very interested, but I always reiterate how this program requires tenacity. That this program is not easy; it requires hard work and resiliency to complete. To my family and friends, I joke that the program is my job in live action. Every day I work with people to overcome their barriers to employment, like childcare or transportation, and a program that not only pays you while you learn but is willing to provide resources on top of that is unheard of. I’ve come across a lot of job training programs and most of them are expensive, require a lot of time out of work, and have no certainty about our job prospects after the program is over with. If I had to have an “elevator pitch” I would say this is a competitive program that can pave the way to a new life if you are diligent enough to complete it. In terms of growth, I’m not just looking to grow my bank account (though that is very nice to think about). I am hoping to grow into a woman my mother would be proud of. My mother left big shoes to fill, and I want to be able to step up to the plate for my family. I have two nephews that are without a grandmother, and I want to try to pick up where my mom left off. I know how important my grandmother was to me. Without her, I never could have had the time to figure out who I was or have been able to attend a 4 year university. My nephews won’t have that, and though I can’t be their grandmother of course, I hope I can grow into a person that can help them learn who they are and what they want to do with their lives. Most importantly I hope I can grow into a better version of myself. I know I am a capable person, but I also want to be accomplished. I want to have a career that really means something to me, one that I’m proud of. My hopes of growth are both personal and professional; I want to not only challenge myself and what I’m made of but break the glass ceiling while I’m at it.

**Written Response Question #4** -- This program is designed to positively change the lives of people in need of upward mobility. Tell us about some of the hardships you are going through or have gone through and what type of impact this program might make on your life.\* *Note: Upward mobility looks different for everybody. If you've struggled with homelessness, if you are living paycheck to paycheck, or even if you are financially secure but just not able to find a job paying a livable wage, employment hurdles and wage stagnation can be a serious burden. Whatever your circumstance may be, rest assured that it will not impact your likelihood for being accepted into the program; there is no "minimum" criteria a candidate must satisfy in order to qualify.*

To start from the beginning, I grew up in a single-wide trailer in a place called Connelly Springs, NC. Some people describe their small towns by only having one stop light, mine doesn’t even have that. A blink-and-you’ll-miss-it type of place. My dad is a truck driver and my mom stayed home when I was a kid (she started working again when I was older). My childhood was violent and traumatic. I only ever saw my dad on with weekends, and my mother suffered with substance use and mental health disorders. Due to absentee parenting, I was molested by a neighbor as a child. My mom abused pain medication and I used to wake up in the middle of the night (as a young child) to make sure my mother didn’t overdose. She had unmanaged bi-polar disorder, which meant she had extreme highs and lows. She was angry and violent; my first physical fight with anyone was with my mom. When I got older, she was gone almost as much as my dad was. I was homeschooled in high school, but I barely saw my mom when I was a teen. At 14 I had a boyfriend who was incredibly abusive (mentally, physically, and sexually). He actually ended up stalking me until my early 20’s even though we broke up when I was 16. My first suicide attempt was also when I was 16. I was made to go to a behavioral health clinic when I was released that made things worse. The people who worked at the clinic didn’t know how to deal with me, they assumed I was making things up (that mom and boyfriend were abusive) so they medicated me and made me go to therapy ever month. I eventually stopped going when my mom stopped taking me. I moved out of my parents’ house and in with my grandmother at 17. I knew that I was only going to get worse living with my parents, so when I wanted to leave, I was lucky enough to have my grandmother that I could trust. Where schooling is concerned, I fell through the cracks. I never actually learned anything being home schooled, so I dropped out to get my G.E.D. at 17. I started college right after I got my G.E.D. I loved college, I really started to thrive as a person in my late teen’s. I never thought about going to a four-year college until a professor I had at CVCC told me that she thought my work was impeccable and I should go for a bachelor’s. Unfortunately mental health spiraled in my early 20’s due to unaddressed trauma and mental health disorders. I gained 80lbs, hated life, didn’t think I was worth anything, didn’t know who I was or what the point of me was. I got married young, at 20, and the marriage that was toxic and miserable. I was very violent and volatile behind closed doors. Through all the fighting and misery I had come to the (painful, to me) conclusion in early 2017 that I was gay. I had dated girls when I was younger, but because of the backlash I got from the people I knew I quickly retreated to the closet. I shoved down all my feelings about women and pretended I never felt them. I didn’t want to be gay (at the time). Once my mother, after finding a poem I wrote a girl, told me (at the age of 12) that she didn’t hate gay people but none of her children were going to be gay. That moment replayed in my head my entire life; that if I was going to be with girls/women my mother would hate me. Even though things between my mother and I were dysfunctional I still wanted her to love me. She’s my mom, you know? In the summer of 2017, my ex-husband pushed me to go to counselling because things had gotten incredibly violent between the two of us (I always started it, he wasn’t the abusive one; I was). November 2017 I was admitted into the hospital again, this time involuntarily, for a psych evaluation. When I was able to go home, I got into therapy and medication management again. By the summer of 2019 I had to go back home because I couldn’t do it anymore. I dropped out of UNC Charlotte and felt like I hit rock bottom. I had to move back home, get a crappy retail job, and try to figure out how I was going to start all over again. I did go home with a mission, though. I was going to go home (to Hickory), but I was going to focus on myself and my mental/physical wellbeing. By September of 2019 my parents came over one night to tell me my mother has stage four large-cell neuroendocrine carcinoma. She had been sick all year but we couldn’t figure out why. I developed an eating disorder, bulimia, to cope with the fact that my mother was dying. I felt so helpless. I came back home to work on myself just to find out my mom was dying and there was nothing I could do to fix it. While my mom was going through chemo I was seeing a therapist every week. She suggested I investigate peer support work because it would fulfill some of the things I was missing in my life. There were a few classes I had to take before I could get certified, which I did both while battling bulimia and the impending death of my mother. January of 2019 my eating disorder peaked and I ended up back in the hospital again. By February of 2019 my mother was gone. I’ve dealt with a lot in my life, but nothing prepared me for her passing. I felt like I was under the mountain at this point. I became numb, but still moving forward. I got a job working in peer support, which is my job now, in May 2019 (which I was very excited about). It quickly became apparent to me that the mental health field is not a career you can easily promote in. The Employment Specialists at my job, who are required to have a bachelor’s and 2,000 hours of working with the target population, only make a few hundred more dollars a month than I do. I don’t think finishing my bachelor’s degree for a few hundred extra dollars a month is worth my time/money/energy. Soon into having the job I began to plan about how to go back to school to finish my bachelor’s in biology to then go on to get a master’s in something like pathology. I even sent my transcripts in, paid my fees, and was ready to start school in the spring. It, again, became quickly apparent that it wasn’t going to happen that easily or quickly. There’s no easy way to work my schedule around a school schedule. I could go back to retail, but I would probably make less and be infinitely more miserable. So now I’m stuck in a job I cannot easily get out of and cannot work a school schedule into. I live paycheck to paycheck on a bare-bones budget. My rent is not expensive, my car is older, and I still get help from my grandma. I feel stuck. I’ve always been an ambitious person, almost every job I’ve had I’ve promoted or came in as a manager. When I go into a job, I’m always looking for opportunities to grow and move up. Unfortunately, with the job I am in, that’s just not possible. I’d love to go back to school, but I just can’t afford it. Even if I did have the money and time to go back, working with a biology degree is the same way—it’s a dead end. Every job I investigated that require a bachelor’s in biology had an income cap, there didn’t seem to be anyway to move up without going back to school. A program like this could give me a chance to start fresh and really make something of myself. This could help me break the generational cycle of poverty that my family has gone through. This could mean I could have a family of my own one day, with a house that isn’t run down and a front yard my future kids could run around in. Financially, this program would enable me to be the woman I want to be for my nephews. I could set them up an education fund and give them a chance to be something more than what their parents had the chance to be. I could give back to the people I love and the people that have been good to me over the years. I would love to work a job where my hard work and ingenuity is rewarded, and not just with an email. I crave a workplace that thrives off innovation and creation, vs being bogged down with “this is how it’s always been done”. The impact of this program would be genuinely life changing for me and the ones I love.