

## **Class of 2020: You Do Have Control over Your Future**

**Jim Lawton, E88**

One of the things I do that I enjoy a great deal is serve as an advisor to students in the computer science, engineering, and entrepreneurship disciplines at my alma mater, Tufts University. It gives me a chance to give back to the place where I learned what it was I wanted to spend my life doing and to connect with those who are shaping the next generation of technology innovation.

Recently, I was part of the panel of judges for the [Tufts \\$100K New Ventures Competition](#). Listening to these young entrepreneurs – so eager, bright, and full of optimism about how their idea would change the world – was certainly a highlight in this strange time we’re experiencing.

It occurred to me as I heard their pitches and read their presentations that they have a very tough road ahead...not at all due to anything they’ve done, or did not do. In fact, many students I advise and many more at colleges and universities all over the world have – for lack of a better way to put – have had the rug pulled out from underneath them. Not walking the stage in cap and gown while hearing their name called is hardly the worst of it.

Those who had internships lined up for the summer have lost those opportunities. Those who had jobs waiting that would launch their careers have learned that they won’t be needed.

The stress they feel is completely rational. The soundtrack in their head is loud and persistent: “My career is being impacted; I won’t be able to compete when job opportunities return because I won’t have a track record of getting the job done – because there are no jobs for me to do. I have no control over this situation and there is nothing I can do about it.”

I want to say to them: Be kind to yourself. Everything will be okay – if you take back the narrative. In my experience in the highly competitive high tech market, at startups and well-established companies, publicly traded and venture-backed, I can assure you that you can take control and you can do something. That is what I – and any hiring manager worth their salt – will want to hear about when you sit down with me for an interview.

One of the lessons we are all learning during this time is that, while we didn't choose this situation, we can choose how we respond to it and what we do while it is happening. Colloquially, you can't control the cards you were dealt but you can control how you play the hand.

Your answer to the question, "How did you spend your time during the pandemic?" will likely be the most important thing a hiring manager is going to look at when we are on the other side of this.

For students like those I mentor at Tufts, who come to the table with computer science expertise there are myriad ways to turn this experience into a positive reflection on themselves. The key is to find a way to create value and to have an impact on the situation. It does not have to be "world-changing" or "earth-shattering" – it simply needs to be useful in this time.

Technology like Facebook and Zoom are transforming how people (many of whom never thought they'd use a computer to communicate) engage in daily life. For anyone with a background in computers, there is an unlimited appetite for showing people how it works, and more.

The bottom line is that you find a way to help. The help will be appreciated. And equally important, it is good for you and your future career. People who take control are happier, experience less mental stress, and are physically better.

Every manager knows that these are unusual times. We won't expect something that wasn't possible. But we will look to see what you did. This is where you can positively impact your own career.

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