

Advice for the Degreeless

By Lancelot Larsen

A great American overachiever said once so profoundly, "Stuff happens." And so stuff does. Even if every child doesn't get left behind, there is no national plan to prevent teens from voluntarily or involuntarily abandoning academic endeavors right after high school or in the middle of college. According to the 2004 Census, only 27% of Americans over 25 hold bachelor degrees or higher.

Everybody knows the wages are rotten for those who take unskilled labor positions. Everybody knows you can't look your landlord in the eye after you chose to indulge in a steak dinner one night and are a few dollars short in the rent the next day. Everybody knows having no college degree forces you to accept working situations where you must choose between eating and paying bills. Everybody knows that the milkman can't afford a wife, children, and house anymore. Everybody knows the milkman now shares a bachelor apartment with a stranger named Skip from Mississippi who used to work in a local call center. Everybody knows a big blue bedspread divides their apartment.

Yes, the value of a college degree increases every year. Even jobs that don't require a college degree are making it increasingly difficult for workers who don't have postsecondary education on account of the competition in the current job market. Registered nurses, for example, have the greatest figures for projected annual job openings, but this career requires at least three years of occupational study in such disciplines as science and mathematics. For unskilled applicants, this is a barrier that puts them right back at square one regarding not having spent several years attending college in the first place. In this case, there are alternatives like becoming a licensed practical nurse. You can attain certification through part-time training programs, which is helpful for those who cannot support themselves and perhaps a family and go to school simultaneously. Most information technology professionals look for applicants with previous work experience. So, even if an unskilled worker attends IT job-training programs, those programs fail to provide internship opportunities or relevant work experience. If applicants choose to attend such training programs, they would do well to ensure that the program has a perfectly clear idea of what employers in that field require from potential hires. Overall, most unskilled workers without a college degree do not have the time or money to prevent themselves from choosing the wrong career path. Very often, unskilled applicants end up in customer service positions that require only a high school diploma. Most of the time, however, employees readily quit these positions because of the low pay received while suffering repetitive work, spying management, and irate customers.

Every American high school kid has heard others in class make unfunny jokes about the C's and D's kids who are future gas-pumpers. Equally, American educators take secret pleasure in scaring kids about being homeless and unhappy or working to death at McDonalds if they don't go to college. But don't worry. If you never started or finished college, there is hope. You don't have to assume you will eternally earn low wages while helping clueless bookstore customers understand why the bookstore doesn't sell first prints of *Hamlet*, or editing resumes for angry, out-of-work attorneys.

The following is a list of jobs in growing industries that pay more than \$25,000 a year that are available to potential employees who hold an associate's degree or less, and do not require a lot of work experience. Together these 16 jobs are expected to create annually more than 700,000 jobs nation-wide

- Registered nurse, \$48,090
- Customer-service representative— \$26,240
- Sales representative (non-technical wholesale and manufacturing)— \$42,730
- Truck driver; heavy and tractor-trailer—\$33,210
- Maintenance and repair worker—\$29,370
- Bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerk—\$27,380
- Executive secretary and administrative assistant—\$33,410
- Secretary (not legal; medical and executive)—\$25,290
- Carpenter—\$34,190
- Automotive (service technician and mechanic)—\$30,590
- Police and sheriff's patrol officer—\$42,270
- Licensed practical and licensed vocational nurse—\$31,440
- Electrician—\$41,390
- All other sales and related workers—\$35,170
- Computer-support specialist—\$39,100
- Plumber, pipe-fitter, and steam-fitter—\$40,170

Also, the *Top 50 Highest-Paying Occupations by Median Hourly Wages Occupational Outlook Handbook (2006–2007)* lists the highest paying jobs for which a degree is not required. For these jobs, you only need some work experience and on-the-job training. Its statistics were gathered by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2005. Some of these jobs are:

Air Traffic Controller

Cops of the skies, they vouchsafe that airplanes fly safely at distance from one another and regulate commercial arrivals and departures. If you are interested in this non-degree-requiring career, enroll in a Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) course and pass a test. Air traffic controllers earned \$51.73 per hour or \$107,600 per year in 2005.

Manager

Of course, this career path applies to a variety of professional fields. They earned a median hourly wage of \$38.06 or \$79,200 annually in 2005.

Industrial Production Manager

They manage the production of millions of annual goods in America. It helps to have a degree to acquire this position, but it is not imperative. On-the-job training is provided. They earned a median hourly wage of \$36.34, annually \$75,600, in 2005.

Transportation, Storage, and Distribution Managers

They abide by government policies and regulations to plan and direct said activities. You must have prior experience in this field, however. These professionals were paid a median hourly wage of \$33.23 or a median annual wage of \$69,100 in 2005.

Nuclear Power Reactor Operator

They control the equipment affecting the reactor power of a nuclear power plant. You will be required to have training and some college courses will be preferred. They earned a median hourly wage of \$31.84 and a median annual wage of \$66,200 in 2005.

First-Line Supervisors and Managers of Police and Detectives

They oversee the actions of cops. You must have related work experience to be considered. Their median hourly wages were \$31.52 and the median annual salary was \$65,600 in 2005.

First-Line Supervisors and Managers of Non-Retail Sales Workers

They manage the activities of sales associates and related retail workers. Experience is required. Their median hourly wages were \$29.79 and the median annual salary was \$62,000 in 2005.

First-Line Supervisors and Managers of Fire Fighting and Prevention Workers

They handle the responsibilities of those who work as firefighters and in other fire prevention jobs. Experience required. They earned median hourly wages of \$29.25 and a median annual salary of \$60,800 in 2005.

Wholesale and Manufacturing, Technical and Scientific Products Sales Representatives

Sales representatives attempt to get buyers to purchase products made by the companies for which they work. On-the-job training is usually provided, but a degree is preferred. Their median hourly wages were \$29.21 and the median annual salary was \$60,800 in 2005.

Gaming Managers

They plan and control casino operations. To enter this field you must have related experience. They earned median hourly wages of \$28.82 and a median annual salary of \$59,900 in 2005.

You may use the Salary Wizard at Salary.com to find out how much income some of these career paths will bestow upon you respective of the city in which you live.

In short, the choices are out there, just keep the faith and, most importantly, be honest.

It goes without saying that we live in a win-at-all-costs culture as evidenced by the shameless mendicant down the street all the way to those who think quietly within secured chambers at the White House. It's easy to take one summer class at your local community college, and then write "some college" on your work application or "B.A. expected 2010" on your resume, or to cloak your degreeless self with how many educational course you have attended. And many hiring professionals assume you bring the educational qualifications for which they ask.

So, it comes as no surprise that a recent survey revealed that more than half of job candidates are less than candid on their resume regarding owning a college degree. If this habit of half-truth trickery is your plan, think again. More often than those who state falsehoods on their resumes, managers and human resource hounds do frequently investigate the validity of what you claim on your resume. Even if you are three hours short of graduating, let them know. If you are found out, they will surely interpret the discrepancy as an integrity issue and say thank you and goodbye on the spot. Also, be consistent with your answers if you write that you are a college graduate and are given

a second opportunity to address the issue (i.e.—grace period, even when asked again during an interview). Don't change your mind. You will be dropped.

Being honest about everything on your resume is particularly imperative when applying for glorious titles such as Vice President of Logistics, especially for multi-billion, multinational companies, as those who do the hiring for positions and places like these are even more likely to implement a more persnickety plan to prove the truth about what you claim on paper.

Take the leap of faith. Your college degree does not weigh as much as you think. In most cases, candidates with a remarkable background and strong chemistry with the company will achieve the positions they seek. It has been said by a trustworthy source that 70% of hiring arises from the good chemistry between candidate and company. A degree is not as important as this connection and work experience. You are more likely to get hired being degreeless but honest than misrepresenting yourself along a fragile bridge of canards.

ON THE NET

16 Careers You Don't Need a Four-Year Degree to Pursue
www.careerjournal.com/jobhunting/change/20051024-coombes.html

Top 10 Highest Paying Occupations for Which a Degree Isn't Required
careerplanning.about.com/od/exploringoccupations/tp/hi_pay_nodeg.htm

No Degree, No Problem
www.net-temps.com/crossroads/article.htm?op=view&id=1017