

If Spending Big Bucks For College, Make Sure You Get Money's Worth

As a headhunter for manufacturing and machining professionals since 1981, my thinking on the importance of four degree as a guarantee to financial independence has started to evolve. I still feel it's wise to get degree if possible for a myriad of reasons, especially for the emotional growth and social skills one attains in college. However, for those getting ready to go to a four year school, I can't impress enough on those individuals that if you're going to make that investment, or, better yet if your family is going to, that you seek a degree that immediately translates to the job market. If anywhere from 80k to 240k is outlaid for your education, you better make sure there is immediate payback for that investment. Make a concerted effort to avoid picking a college because your friends are going there or the Greek scene is fun, or they have 88 different football uniform combinations, and seek one that has a degree that segues to the job market. Whether it be engineering, banking, finance, Industrial design, Insurance, cad design, manufacturing engineering, Education, Health administration, Physical therapy, computer science or coding, electrical technology, construction technology, accounting etc. These are an example of some of the degrees that will better position you to easily find employment immediately after college. If you choose a degree in something less "marketable" or "specific" like Humanities, 8th Century Mesopotamian Philosophy, Modern Dance, "general" Business, Theoretical Equestrian Studies, Sports Management, Left Handed Puppetry, etc. you better have a good personality and predilection for assertiveness as to "sell yourself" into entry level positions in other professions. I like to call these degrees "POLR" degrees, or "path of least resistance". However, if you fork out all that money for a degree that will meet with resistance in the job market, you may want to rethink that investment. This brief window after college must be well utilized for although hard to see that at the time, that's the window to get that training for many find that once straddled with financial commitments such as car or rental payments or even a family, its hard to give it your full focus at that point. A college education boils down purely to being an investment, and a very costly one at that. It's an investment to one able to secure employment and gain financial independence within a short period of time. Granted its often hard to know what you want to do by your freshman year and that's an understandable not to mention common situation. For instance, I picked a BS in Hotel Restaurant Management because it looked like a path of minimal resistance at the time, not to mention the department head took us all out drinking on orientation day and we were "sold". I attended Webber International in Babson Park Fl because I had a very specific prerequisite that I be accepted by the school I attended and that's how I ended up there. However, even though a Hospitality degree is in fact a very marketable degree, to this day I've never worked in that industry and couldn't "buss" a table if I had to as my wife can attest to. However, I got lucky having the guts to knock on every door in every single industrial and office park in Charlotte in 1981, something to this day I'm still surprised I had the nerve to do. There are many A.S. degrees or even certificates out there that make one extremely marketable in the workplace such as HVAC, Electricians trade, plumbing, carpentry, welding, cabinetmaking, plant maintenance, which incorporates electronics, pneumatics, hydraulics and PLC programming; CNC machining; CAD/CAM and drafting; and the list goes on and on. There are shortages of skilled people in almost every aforementioned discipline. There are 3-month condensed computer "Full stack" script coding courses out there that can be very lucrative. However, if one determines that an alternative to the conventional 4 yr. onsite degree is the road they want to go, segueing the A.S. degree into a related 4 yr. degree would be all the better and a great idea if one is able and so motivated. Yes, by going to a technical school initially you miss the camaraderie often experienced gained by living onsite at a college your freshman year, but one must look long term – making a living and not living off cans of Farber beans in your parent's pantry. That concept, "developing a career" must trump all else. If during a four-year degree you have the chance to take an unrelated elective, avoid that course in "Beginner Cumberbund Design" Or the "America Sucks 101" course that seems to be popular now, or where the online site rates the teacher as an "easy A" and take a course where you actually learn something, even if it's something as rudimentary as "Basic Personal Finance". During summers, instead of waiting tables, seek a job where your exposed to a company that's related to your degree even if it's doing grunt work and sweeping metal chips off the floor at a machine shop or whatever so you get a feel of how the business works. You have to develop the mindset that everything in that post- high school period must involve "moving the chains downfield." Another idea is to learn a secondary skill such as

carpentry, brick masonry or bartending or what have you so one can pay the bills and not build up debt while they pursue a career in their expertise. Although eager to dive in after graduation, don't hesitate to consider additional technical training in your niche, even something like advanced Excel. It's unlikely that those skills wouldn't come in handy. There are "For Profit" organizations in every town that offer condensed 1- or 2-day courses in anything from advanced Excel to CRM or Database software. It's rare to see a job description where some sort of CRM or the Microsoft suite is not preferred. Even a 2-year stint in the military would garner one very marketable technical training not to mention being appealing to prospective employers. However, to my knowledge there's no WI-FI in foxholes so that might be a turn off for the majority of the current generation. If one is fortunate to have someone else pay for their education, you may want to make it a point to reimburse the financier for every dollar spent after the 8th semester provided it's still in the pursuit of the undergraduate degree. You're there to learn and study at an unbelievable cost per day, not there to "find Your way" and stay baked 20% of the time. Last year's college admissions scandal blows my mind for one celebrity forked out 500k to get 2 kids into USC, a school that would have cost less than the amount she had to fork out to incentivize individuals to gain admission. Seems to me it would have been more cost effective to just give both kids 250k each and tell them to be on their way and get the heck out of the house and let them "Instagram away" their lives. After all wasn't the education, in theory at least, a method to give them the tools to make them able to make money? Would Cal-Davis or Long Beach State have been that bad? There is a myriad of colleges up north and in the upper Midwest that have even more and very specific and marketable programs of specialization one can explore, some programs and disciplines one can't even imagine and would send a child on a path that's rewarding and lucrative. This, of course, is post-grad after the 6 months of the deprogramming of the narrative you have been told by your professors about how America made Hitler and Genghis Khan look like Eagle Scouts by comparison. I know it's hard to see the long-term picture when you're 18 years old but the college years go by quickly compared to the 45 to 50 years you'll be working and believe me, when you're back home making good money while your best friend who majored in Serbian Art History is still "in between jobs", you'll be glad you went that route. Again, remember, college is to train you to be self-sufficient and make a living, not a Summer Camp. "Someone" is paying dearly for that education. For those who are lucky enough to have a family member pay for it you must realize in some cases its large chunk of their net worth or their retirement funds so best not to piss it away. It's almost like putting money on a horse at the track and hoping it hits a payday. It's difficult to see that at this point, but its worth at least trying to see the bigger picture and focus your eyes on the prize, not which Greek house is more fun. You will not regret it down the road.

-Fielding Mellish, SPRA, FRA, DCER, RTMA,