



PART ONE

# INTRODUCTION

Wasn't this supposed to be easy? Sending your child to college to get an education and expecting them to get a job upon graduating. What happened?

Young adults are graduating from colleges and universities unprepared for the job market. They are struggling to be proactive in their job search and meet the expectations of employers. Many can't communicate their value or speak about their skills in a way that connects with those who may hire them. Even when they are readily available, students are not utilizing the resources their colleges have to offer during their (at least) four-year journey—such as guidance from career services or relevant internship experience—to lay the foundation for a successful job search.

Some have no idea what they want to do, or they never felt particularly connected to their college major and don't know

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what kind of role would be a good fit. More importantly, many are not taught how to look for their first job. **This is a problem.**

The result is stress on the entire household, and tension between discouraged graduates and their frustrated parents. Though they may try to help, they find they cannot because they haven't conducted an entry-level job search in thirty years, don't know about the field their children are trying to enter, or are dismissed when they try to share useful pieces of advice. A new graduate living back home and stressed out about their lack of job prospects can impact the entire family dynamic. As the saying goes, "Parents are only as happy as their unhappiest child."

Parents call me because they realize it's time for an outside perspective and some expert guidance. They likely hired an SAT tutor or college advisor once upon a time—someone to get their son or daughter *into* their college of choice. Now, they need someone to get them *out* and on to their next great step.

Does this sound a little too familiar?

The data supports these feelings. 87% of college graduates believe they are ready to work but only 50% of hiring managers agree. 43% of this cohort will be underemployed after graduating.<sup>1</sup> Internships can help tip these stats in a new grad's favor—and it's helpful to note that one out of

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1 D'Orio, Wayne, "Are Grads Ready to Work?" Human Resource Executive, April 11, 2018 Are Grads Ready to Work? | HRExecutive.com

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ten internships takes place in the year *following* graduation. At least 60% of students in each graduating class since 2013 participated in an internship and/or co-op during their time in college and approximately 70% of employers offer their interns full-time jobs. Students who completed an internship are 15% less likely to be unemployed in the first years after college.<sup>2</sup> Yet a study recently completed using data from labor-market analytics firm Burning Glass Technologies, found that hiring for entry-level college graduate positions has recently fallen 45%, more than for any other category of education.<sup>3</sup>

As the parent of a new graduate, you read statistics like these and feel a stab of fear: the numbers hit close to home. You've done everything right and supported your young adult in every possible way for the past twenty or more years, but now you feel powerless as that elusive first (or right) full-time job offer fails to appear for your child.

As you and your family search for a way to fill in the gaps, I want to assure you the right job opportunity is out there for your child—a role in which they will continue to learn and grow. By helping them build the confidence and self-knowledge necessary not only to thrive in their first professional role, but

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2 Milenkovic, Milica, "To Intern or Not to Intern: 30+ Eye-Opening Internship Statistics," Small Biz Genius: 30+ Eye-Opening Internship Statistics: 2021 Data And Trends (smallbizgenius.net) Accessed November 8, 2021.

3 Selingo, Jeffrey and Sigelman, Matt, "The Crisis of Unemployed College Graduates," The Wall Street Journal, Feb. 4, 2021; <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-crisis-of-unemployed-college-graduates-11612454124> Accessed June 24, 2021.

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in their entire career, you equip them with skills that will serve your new graduate for decades to come.

This book is for parents who want to see their children achieve success, specifically a first real job offer or internship in their field of choice. It's for parents who are seeing that when it comes to their new graduate's job search, things are simply not clicking. This book is the answer for how to guide your child toward a career, especially when they are waiting, hoping, and randomly applying.

### **A New Approach**

I've seen this problem play out for many years. My friends would say, "I don't get it. My kids went to a great school, earned a great GPA, and they can't get a job." At the same time, I was a corporate consultant noticing that my executive clients would pass over recent grads while positions in their companies went unfilled, and then express frustration about the lack of applicants. By explanation, they would claim young candidates "didn't get it" and that they did not want to invest in the time to train them.

**I saw a big disconnect between employer expectations for hiring and the skill set recent grads thought they had for the workplace.** *"What if students knew how to approach the job search like a CEO?" I asked. How could we create a solution to this ongoing problem?*

What if we taught college grads to have a strategy for their job search? And taught them how to differentiate themselves?

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And finally, what if we taught them how to execute, and have a clear plan every time they meet a prospective employer? We tested these ideas with students and grads from community colleges to Ivy League schools, students with tremendous potential who lacked the skills we were teaching. Very quickly, the consensus was, “We need this. We need this type of help.”

We learned that our concepts were new and fresh to these students, as they were not being taught these necessary job seeking skills in college. As one young man put it, he knows he has to climb the job search ladder but does not know how or where to start. We set the ladder up, with a strong foundation and an expert to guide them along the way.

Today, my team and I help new graduates think about the skills they have to offer in a way that makes sense to the organizations with whom they’ll eventually work. We help your grad eliminate generalities in their communication and target specific roles and people in their network.

This book outlines our process for helping parents to empower their young adults to reduce fear, build confidence, and utilize proven strategies to land the job. Students and new college graduates assess where they are and where they’d like to go, but we have written this for you, their parents or guardians. Using the tools and processes in these pages, you’ll be empowered to help your new grad define and communicate their core skills, target appropriate companies and specific people at those companies, come up with a meeting plan, and practice their interviewing techniques. This is a process your new graduate can begin with your help, with a trusted family friend, or with

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one of our certified coaches. Your child is three quarters of the way toward independent adulthood. I am here to help you help them on that journey by providing the Next Great Step.

In section one, we'll explore some of the thoughts you as parents have shared about the hiring process as well as the misconceptions you may have about job-seeking—and why you are often unable to help your children get that first job offer. We will explain how new graduates *themselves* are feeling—and common mistakes they are making—in the midst of a process that might not be going as smoothly as they had planned. And we will share expert insight on how your new graduate is viewed through the eyes of employers as well as the disconnect between young job seekers' expectations and the reality of that first job. Section two of the book will share the solution to these problems with the tried-and-true proprietary Next Great Step process, as well as ways you can help your student succeed.

These life skills are not taught at most colleges or universities, among your student's or new grad's peer group, or even in the home. Yet these skills are worth hundreds of thousands, or even millions of dollars, throughout a career. The things we teach new grads are not just relevant for securing that first job but necessary for decades to come. Having the confidence to ask for promotions or raises, and look for new roles when the time is right, is invaluable. As a result of more fully realizing their professional potential, your grad's overall satisfaction and earnings will be exponential. If the average college tuition with

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room and board per year is \$50,000,<sup>4</sup> and colleges can teach students skills that will enable them to get a job at \$55k,<sup>5</sup> the return on investment of a college education over their career becomes a no-brainer. But when grads are unable to find work, flounder in jobs that do not require a college degree, or do not emerge with the skills needed to land a job their return on investment is not as high.

Our company has helped hundreds of grads land new jobs in all industries and fields, ranging from engineering and graphic design, to theater and digital marketing, and from accounting to positions at consulting firms and the top investment banks. We see the full range of majors and help graduates find positions in both the corporate and nonprofit worlds.

Not getting a job offer or a solid internship is such a disappointment to your student or new grad. They're all stunned when they reach what feels like an insurmountable roadblock. They don't know the game or how to present themselves.

It's time for a new approach.

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4 "How Much Does College Cost?" CollegeData.com, <https://www.collegedata.com/resources/pay-your-way/whats-the-price-tag-for-a-college-education> Accessed November 8, 2021.

5 Hess, Abigail Johnson, "College Graduate Starting Salaries Are At An All-Time High," <https://www.cnn.com/2021/09/01/college-graduate-starting-salaries-are-at-an-all-time-high.html> Accessed November 8, 2021.

### KARA'S STORY

Michael was worried about his daughter Kara, who had graduated as a computer science major from a highly selective private university more than a year before we spoke. When she completed her coursework with a STEM focus and graduated with honors, everyone in the family thought Kara would have several job opportunities available to her. They believed companies would be competing to hire her, particularly as the family lived near many tech companies headquartered in a major city.

The reality of the situation turned out to be much different than anyone had anticipated. Kara's job search had been nothing but a struggle—an experience that deeply eroded her self-confidence and left Michael feeling desperate to help his daughter, yet he was not sure where to turn, or even what to say to her.

Today, she is feeling lost and disconnected. Over the past year, she applied to many jobs online, but when she did not see results, she got discouraged. She would send one email, but when the person she messaged did not follow up, Kara assumed they were not interested and did not reach out again. One setback led to another and another, and a year later, she's still living with her parents and feeling completely defeated.

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It's difficult for any new graduate to stay motivated after going so many months without responses from any employers, and Kara has not been aggressive in pursuing opportunities. This is the first time in her young life she's failed so noticeably, and it feels as if the stakes could not be higher.

"The last person she wants to take advice from is a parent," Michael told me. "Even though I have corporate experience and have hired many candidates."

His feeling of powerlessness echoes that of many parents I've spoken to in the last five years. Kara's biggest challenge? Lack of confidence. She is so easily discouraged that she won't follow up with the people who could actually help her. She doesn't yet understand that the process she is trying to navigate is not about her. It is about how she can help a company achieve greater success because of her. Her job needs to be finding a job, but Kara is doing what countless new grads do when they don't get the results they're seeking: she has started coming up with excuses as to why she can put certain tasks off until tomorrow—which then becomes a week, a month, five months.

Kara and other new university graduates need structure, encouragement, accountability, and guidance. In most cases, parents can provide these things, but their efforts are often not well received. Michael worries to the point where he cannot offer objective advice

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or a cool head. What is most important to him? For his daughter to feel good about herself and find a job where she is valued and making a contribution. He is much more concerned about these things than about her salary. He wants his daughter to have self-worth, to wake up every morning and feel a sense of purpose.

“I need someone to fill in the gaps,” he concluded. “Kara is lost and I cannot help her.”

**PART ONE**

**THE**

**PROBLEM**





CHAPTER ONE

# THE PARENTS' PERSPECTIVE

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## SECTION 1: It's Not What They Promised

When your child got into the college of their dreams, you probably felt a weight off your shoulders: *we did it!* Adulthood, unlocked.

You got them to the finish line. Right?

In one sense, yes. But in another, not exactly. Getting into college and ultimately graduating is a huge—*huge*—accomplishment that you and everyone in your family should be proud of. Unfortunately, **one of the biggest misconceptions I hear from parents is the idea that their child's university will “take it from here” when it comes to securing them a job.** This is understandable as the admissions team and the school's

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overall branding and promotion may have focused strongly on post-graduation career outcomes.

I understand you and your student may have been sold a campus with an amazing career services center, or subscribed to the notion that your student can relax their freshman and sophomore years and worry about the job search later. While this sounds appealing, particularly after navigating the often highly pressurized admissions process, I'd like to gently burst this bubble. It might be wise for your son or daughter to think ahead to post-college life for the entirety of their college career—and be wary about leaving things in the hands of the campus career center (which may not be much help at all).

When you and your grad decided on which school they would attend, you assumed that they would receive solid career guidance at school. That the university would connect them with many potential employers and would have a solid internship or job.

Isn't that what they promised you on the campus tour?

Parents believe that career centers are more equipped and involved than they really are. Furthermore, according to a recent report, fewer than 20% of undergraduate students actually reach out to their school's career centers for advice on finding jobs or on finding and applying to graduate programs.<sup>6</sup> Another study revealed that only 17% of those

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6 Fadulu, Lola "Why Aren't College Students Using Career Services?" <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2018/01/why-arent-college-students-using-career-services/551051/> Accessed July 14, 2021.

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who graduated from 2010 to 2016 said they found their college career centers to be “very helpful.” Fewer than 40% said they found career centers to be “somewhat helpful,” and 17% said the interactions were not helpful at all.<sup>7</sup>

Many colleges and universities do not devote enough resources to career services. A well-known large public university, for example, only had 16 advisors for *20,000 undergraduates*. That’s one advisor for every 1250 students. Universities don’t invest in career services the same way they might be willing to invest in a new stadium or a recreational activity center. Most universities feel their only job is to educate students, not to get them a job after graduation. **Life skills, such as networking, are not part of the curriculum.** Furthermore, the people in the career services positions that do exist have often been doing the job for thirty years. It may be hard for them to give relevant and personalized advice to students today, or for the student to relate to someone of that age. Universities, community colleges, and technical schools should be doing a much better job of lining up job shadowing opportunities and mentorships for their students with professionals in various fields and industries. There is a huge disconnect between what life is like as a student and what it becomes when a young adult starts working full-time.

Though career planning isn’t part of the curriculum at most colleges and universities today, I think we’re about to see a lot of

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7 New, Jake, “Looking for Career Help” <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/12/13/only-17-percent-recent-graduates-say-career-centers-are-very-helpful> Accessed July 14, 2021.

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upheaval in higher education, particularly as families question the value of online/remote classes and the amount they're paying (or the amount their child may be borrowing) to cover tuition. Career services offices need a branding makeover or a major update on most campuses, because everyone needs a job after graduation.

One type of curriculum that I believe gets it right is undergraduate programs that include a mandatory internship in order to graduate. Colleges and universities with this type of requirement must foster and maintain deep connections with local businesses and organizations to ensure each student is placed in an internship. More universities need to follow this lead.

### **Avoiding Career Resources**

Students also avoid school-sponsored career fairs because they may face rejection in these settings and that is uncomfortable. In addition, there are often hundreds of other students and long lines at these events. **They believe their peers have it all figured out and they're the only one who feels lost or overwhelmed.**

They think family or friends will link them to a job when they graduate, so attending a fair isn't necessary. In some cases, seniors will say, "I went to the career fair, but it was a waste of effort because the companies don't look appealing or they just told me to apply online." They come away feeling discouraged and unsure that their university can really assist.

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Four out of ten students do not use career services or attend career fairs when they're at school. This is unfortunate, as **it is the only time in a young person's life when businesses are actively looking for them!** Furthermore, those who *do* choose to attend career fairs get practice meeting people and talking about themselves and their career interests. It's wise for students to attend career fairs and networking events in college even if they haven't yet declared a major as it's never too early to explore options, meet people, and get more comfortable asking questions about different job roles and industries.

Students are often not mature enough—or don't care enough early in their college journey—to pursue the resources that are available or attend the fairs created for them. Their thinking is, “I just want to enjoy going to school; I'll worry about that later.” It's often a timing thing, “I'm just a freshman, why would I possibly need to go to the career fair?” Events like this seem very intimidating to new undergraduates, and many students feel as if they were just put through the wringer getting *into* college. So, when someone invites them to a career fair event, they'll say, “Who would I even meet there? I'm not ready and I have class that day.” If the student is in the liberal arts school, they'll often say, “I don't know what my job's going to be yet, anyway.” In addition, many of the companies that do work with a particular school's career services offices may be local, and that may not appeal to students who don't plan to stay in the region after graduation.

So many students do not have clarity on their major or course of study. I understand your child might be in this camp, but

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this doesn't completely excuse them from taking advantage of the career services resources or career fair events that exist at their school. Encourage them to think of it as an exploration. Those students who *do* go to career services or talk with advisors and local HR professionals are that much further ahead of those who are too shy or hesitant to do so. It's never too early. Guide your young adult (who may still be a college freshman or sophomore) to think of it like this: You may not be hungry now, but you know you'll need food soon so you better figure out where the dining hall is located and go see what they have.

### Internships Can Wait... Or Can They?

In 2005, a young mechanical engineering graduate found an internship for a small theme park ride development firm. He pursued the opportunity, and in 2021 became the company's Chief Development Officer. Internships are important for several key reasons, and even if your son or daughter is only a college freshman, it isn't too early for them to think about one. A recent study showed that employers are more likely to respond to intern applicants who have had a previous internship, so that first experience matters more than you might expect down the road.<sup>8</sup> Internships help students gain firsthand experience and insight into how the working

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8 David A. Jaeger, John M. Nunley, Alan Seals & Eric J. Wilbrandt, "The Demand for Interns" (National Bureau of Economic Research, February 2020) The Demand for Interns | NBER Accessed November 8, 2021.

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world operates. They also help students and new grads see things through an employer's eyes—an attractive quality in a job seeker at any level. Employers say they prefer work or internship experience over a high GPA, in fact.

Students who anticipate what an employer is focused on will better relate to them and have greater success during their eventual full-time job search. Students should be able to answer the question, “What does a CEO/Department Head/Manager worry about?” There are many metrics that companies of all sizes track, including quarterly profits, number of units produced or services provided, time to market, customer service, etc. Students that demonstrate their understanding of what is important to an employer and then show how they can make the business more successful will ultimately see more job offers at the beginning of their careers than those who cannot do so.

Internships also increase students' networks of professional contacts. Students often have sizable networks that include fellow students, professors, parents and alumni. Internships add another layer of potential contacts and friendships to this list. The students who network and form relationships with their diverse connections can eventually use these relationships to help find new opportunities. This is a much more effective approach for a job search than applying online and crossing your fingers. It's never too early for your student to seek out and apply for internships in their field of interest—even as a freshman. Where an internship ultimately teaches them

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what they *don't* want to do, that knowledge is also invaluable, especially when it's built on experience.

It's time to expand our collective definition of internships. Instead of just thinking about some formal ten-week program at a large corporate consultancy, guide your student to do things like:

- Work a few hours per week at a local law firm, accountant's office, or veterinary clinic
- Offer to help a local small business plan an event, write content, or increase its presence on social media
- Serve as quality-control or a user experience tester for an e-commerce site
- Create a crowdfunding campaign for a local nonprofit initiative
- Design print marketing materials or a website for a student organization
- Offer to organize online file systems and delete or properly re-categorize unused data
- Do lead generation research and create a database of fresh contacts for a local entrepreneur or real estate agent

## SECTION 2: “I Thought I Could Help”

Something I often hear from parents whose children are having difficulty securing that first job offer is an issue we already touched on where I often hear, “**My daughter/son won’t take my advice.**” A huge misconception on the part of parents is that their advice will make that first offer for their children a piece of cake.

If you’ve ever thought, “I can make an introduction and my kid will get a job,” then this chapter is for you. Of course, it’s okay for parents to make introductions. However, your young adult may not be ready for them. I have heard many stories from parents who make introductions to the head of a company or department, and find that their child does not do well in the informational interview. They are too casual or assume Mom or Dad will ensure they get the job—which often does not happen. Be sure about your timing and understand what your new graduate’s capabilities are.

Keep in mind that you and your child are not a team. **You are not both looking for your first job.** Yes, if you have interviewing or hiring experience, industry related experience, or specific company knowledge, it is perfectly fine to teach your child what you know about the process. Giving guidance on who to connect with and office etiquette tips are great. But don’t take over—**finding a job is their**

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**job, not yours.** Think about how you would mentor a friend's child.

My guess is you're butting heads and your son or daughter isn't listening to your words of wisdom. The problems may have their roots in decisions made years ago. For example, you may have nudged your child into a particular major, only to hear now that they want nothing to do with that field. Or, you may feel confused about the path they've chosen because it's different from your own and your child is shutting you out. I've had parents who are physicians that tell me, "My son is an environmental science major who studies sustainability. I am a well-educated person, but I don't know that field. I don't understand it and I don't know how to make connections for him."

As a parent, you want to see your children achieve success. When it comes to the job search, even though you've encouraged certain actions or techniques, things are not clicking. Your kid is not listening to you, they're waiting too late to get started, and everyone is frustrated. When parents call me in September after a long summer watching their child fail to line up a job offer, I often hear, "**I wish I knew then what I know now. I wish I understood how competitive the process is and that they should have started testing out the waters sooner.**" Now the search is sputtering out and they're not networking at all."

It's hard to know the right thing to do. You've put a lot of faith into your son or daughter's school to help, you've tapped out your own connections, and you might be thinking it's

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just a numbers game—*something* will materialize if your child applies to enough positions, right? It's not your fault they're floundering. The truth is, however, that approaching a job search like a numbers game isn't particularly helpful. Submitting more resumes doesn't always generate more interviews, and more interviews do not always lead to more offers. It's about focus: quality over quantity.

### Is It Too Late?

If you've picked up this book after your child has graduated, you may be feeling like it's too late to take action or that getting meaningful internships or entry-level job experiences won't be easy at this point.

That's not the case.

**It's not too late and you are *not* behind.** Yes, it's best for college students to begin planning for their futures early if they know what they want to do after graduation. But if your child hasn't done so, let me be the first to calm you: it's never too late for them to find their path.

Have they suffered a little bit? **Have they had enough pain in what they've done so far to reset?** Many new grads need a few months to realize that the vicious cycle of applying for random jobs online has gotten them nowhere. Going through that process often leaves them open to hearing how a successful job search is actually done. If your new graduate is curious about approaching things in a new way, this is the

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right time to get serious and begin a process that will lead to a job in their desired field.

It doesn't matter what time of year it is or how old the job seeker happens to be. **It matters how open and willing a person is: their readiness to listen and try new things.** When I hear, "I don't know what to do anymore," I know we can help.

**It's never too late.** Society creates a lot of pressure about timeframes: You've got to graduate in four years and have this job and get married and buy a house. I think we need to let go of the timing pressure that exists in our own heads. Everybody's on their own schedule and sometimes people don't figure out what they want until later in their career—or until after they've done a few things and realize what they don't like.

A first job is just that: a *first job*. It does not have to be forever, and it allows a young careerist to explore an opportunity that they hope to grow in. It's not uncommon to hear of "dream" jobs that ended up making people miserable. I was recently reminded of this by a good friend of mine at my college reunion. She accepted an incredible job at a sought-after investment banking firm and she *hated* the position. She pivoted quickly to medical school, and became a wonderful ICU doctor.

**It's never too late.**

## What's The Tipping Point?

How long can you stand to watch your grad work on their job search without getting results? Or consider giving up completely because they've gotten so discouraged? The status quo isn't sustainable. Your child's job search has stalled and you're worried about their self-worth. You fear their lack of motivation could be a sign of something more serious like depression or anxiety. You see that your new grad is going through a very difficult situation and that it's changed them. In some cases, it may be their first major failure in life. They can look so discouraged, so stuck.

**The longer the job search takes, the less capable a grad feels.** They start to feel depressed over the continued rejection. It starts to alter their mind-set and shake their confidence. They avoid, procrastinate and start to give up.

**If you hear yourself saying, "Just take any job," it might be time for you to step back as this is rarely the smartest move.** When you notice yourself telling others, "My kid has no idea what to do. They don't feel connected to their major, and they really don't know what role to go into at all," it's time for them to gather more information. This means new graduates in this situation need to work on understanding what's out there—what kinds of jobs are realistically available and what they consist of.

Saying, "You can do anything!" creates problems as well. I recently spoke to a father whose son, Jason, went to a

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private university, studied sports management, and had great internships for a variety of pro teams. On paper, it made no sense that this young man had no job offers given such an impressive resume. His father, a lawyer, said, “I’ve tried to make some introductions, but something’s missing. My son knows exactly what he wants to do, but can’t close the deal.” Graduates like Jason either can’t get an interview, or when they do, they can’t get an offer. Something’s wrong.

In this case, the problem was a lack of interview preparation. Jason talked way too much and was way too general. He was all over the place in interviews, not focused. Even though he had done great things and his resume was actually getting picked up by the right people (which is half the battle), Jason was rambling on and on in person. I saw, after talking with him, that he was losing his interviewers. To his father, this young man was saying, “Oh, it’s just very competitive.” That wasn’t the core problem as he had the credentials to compete—Jason had the required skills and experience. He just needed to stay focused and practice his interviewing skills. While we may deal with young adults whose confidence is flailing, sometimes they’ve been pumped up too much by you, their parents. I talked with a father not too long ago who is the CEO of a big company. He kept saying, “My son’s a rock star. My son is the best; he’s the most amazing!”

I said, “I understand that you love your son. But maybe the fact that you keep telling him this is hurting him.” After he shared more about his son’s career search, I offered my analysis:

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His son sounded like he was a bit unfocused and that is why he was not getting hired.

This was a perfect example of overinflating a new graduate. I'm all about confidence but the situation was over the top.

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### SECTION 3: The Mental Health Question

Mental health is an important topic today and one we cannot ignore as parents. **Job seekers often feel discouraged or even depressed due to the constant rejection they experience.** Some of it is concrete rejection: losing job opportunities to peers or other candidates, and some of it is perceived rejection: not hearing back after submitting dozens of applications. Discouragement also comes from thinking they are the only one who has not “launched” in their class or friend group.

Mental health issues are common in young adults. Therefore, if this is something you are concerned about, please know that you are not alone. One of my colleagues is Dr. Julia Turovsky, a clinical psychologist who specializes in anxiety and depression in young adults. The former director of the Anxiety Disorders Clinic at Rutgers University, Dr. Turovsky is an expert in the field and sometimes I refer families to her. She noted that rates of mental health diagnoses are unprecedented today—**upwards of 40% of the young adult population**

**reported experiencing anxiety or depression**, according to the NIMH.<sup>9</sup>

I asked Dr. Turovsky for her insights and advice for parents when it comes to their young adults' mental health. She shared, "Each part of life brings a stretch and a challenge; organisms exist between periods of stasis and then periods of change. If there's too much stasis, we grow stagnant and if there's too much change, we become disorganized and chaotic. The general advice here is to understand that there needs to be these developmental shifts and that **your child has to assume adulthood at some point**. Helping them sometimes involves giving them a little room to struggle. Being uncomfortable, being stressed, and being worried are all normal and healthy emotions that challenge young people to develop further. These worries motivate and push them to develop further, to progress and feel confident in their decisions."

**Anxiety and depression aren't always as easy to spot as we may think.** "When a young adult hasn't been forthcoming about what's going on inside their head," Dr. Turovsky said, "these disorders can look like laziness, disorganization, lack of motivation, or apathy. But hiding behind those symptoms could be tremendous worry or perfectionism. Your child may feel like if they don't get the perfect job or the most prestigious

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9 Vahratian A, Blumberg SJ, Terlizzi EP, Schiller JS. "Symptoms of Anxiety or Depressive Disorder and Use of Mental Health Care Among Adults During the COVID-19 Pandemic — United States," (MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2021;70:490–494, August 2020–February 2021), <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7013e2>.

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job, they're a failure. Thus, holding back and not labeling the behaviors or the actions you're frustrated with is important—because all it does is take the young adult further into self-doubt, highlights their lack of competence, and impairs the relationship. Trying to assess *why* your child might be struggling and not jumping to a conclusion is wise. Of course, there are the kids who are fine and insist a job needs to be stimulating and interesting.”

Parents need to be aware that when their kids can't get out of bed all day, they may be clinically depressed, not just lazy. “Depression can be easier to spot than anxiety because it has more physical and biological symptoms. The person looks really tired and sad. You can see changes in appetite, sleep, energy, focus, and concentration. Generalized anxiety, worry, perfectionism, obsessive compulsive disorder, or trauma can be much more difficult to see. People with anxiety are the highest functioning individuals of anyone with mental health issues. They look really good and they tend to be high performers or even overachievers.”

While no one knows your child better than you do, we encourage involving a therapist, psychologist, or other mental health expert if you have concerns.

### STEPHEN'S STORY

One of my very early clients, Stephen, was a brilliant kid who came out of the University of Michigan and eventually went on to UCLA. He was super smart. When he came to me, I asked, “Who has a vested interest in your success? Parents or mentors? What are their expectations?”

Stephen replied, “Both of my parents are PhDs. One’s a PhD in civil engineering, and the other has a PhD in Biomedical Engineering. In their minds, you are only successful when you have a PhD.”

The problem, of course, was Stephen didn’t want to pursue a career in academia. He went to school to be a pharmacist and then realized he hated it but he thought might prefer being a nurse. Ultimately, Stephen decided he really enjoyed research. Today, he does cancer research in the lab at UCLA, but it was extremely difficult for him to break out from his parents’ expectations and find a path forward that fit.

## Creating Space and a Healthy Dialogue

As parents, we often communicate high expectations without even realizing it. We don’t intend to make our kids stressed or feel guilty, but we do. **We have to remember to ease up on this unsaid pressure as they are trying to figure out their**

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**lives and we need to give them some emotional space to figure out what they really want.**

“Criticizing and pointing out that they’re struggling or expressing your frustration or doubt isn’t helpful,” noted Dr. Turovsky. “For example, saying things like, *You’ll never get a job*, or, *What’s wrong with you?* or, *You were lazy in college and you’re lazy now.* are not useful.” That said, the opposite isn’t good, either. Some parents will tell their kids not to worry, that everything will work out and they will take care of it. Finding that gentle balance between being supportive and helpful and creating some independence is the key.”

“Kids who just graduated college and are looking for jobs are really nervous about what they’ll be able to accomplish in the world,” she concluded. “Opening up and having a dialogue with your children is great—explore how they’re feeling and support them and their emotions without intervening. Allow them to share and express some of their doubts and concerns without talking them out of those feelings or shutting them down. To get that conversation going, ask, ‘How do you feel about finishing school?’”

“When young adults come to their parents with their problems or issues, they just want their parents to listen. They just want supportive validation, without the false platitudes. None of that generic stuff is as useful as saying, **‘I hear you. I support you.** I know you’re going to miss your friends. You’re going to miss sleeping. I’m here to listen to your concerns.’ **It’s all about listening and validating, rather than problem solving or fixing.**”

## SECTION 4: Things Have Changed Out There... Right?

A parent will say to their child, “Why don’t you pick up the phone? Call some people!” To which the new grad says, “That’s not how it’s done anymore!”

**Parents often don’t realize how scared their kids are.** That’s why they don’t want to “pick up the phone” to call a potential employer: “It’s not our fault,” a recent college graduate explained when I noted his generation’s discomfort with calling people on the phone. He’s right. Young people grew up texting or messaging on their devices; they’ve had much less practice than we did at age 22 talking to new people and looking them in the eye.

We as parents are unsure how to proceed because we looked for our first jobs so long ago. While some fundamentals in the process haven’t changed, a lot of the steps are in fact different. Thirty years ago, you were looking in a newspaper for job openings and circling ads. You were also calling people on the phone and going to local networking events. Today, technology has altered the job search and many people are getting lost in the various platforms and social media channels.

New college graduates are seeing LinkedIn, Indeed, and all these boards where people post jobs and think, “This must be where you need to go.” **They are over-relying on the**

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**technology and have become distracted and misguided about what it will actually do for them.**

Google and LinkedIn are phenomenal in terms of research, but using them doesn't lead directly to job offers even if candidates apply to hundreds of positions. Companies don't make buying or talent decisions; people do within the company. In the end, it's a person your new grad needs to communicate to...not a company or company image. *People hire people, not online resumes or tracking systems.*

Making a phone call, writing a good letter, showing you have a real connection, and explaining how you might be able to correlate your skills to the needs of a company has not changed. It's just that the technology in the middle has misled our graduates into believing that it alone can solve the problem. Parents think the same way, yet don't actually understand how any of it works. **If your child is one of 100 or 1,000 new grads who submitted a resume to a company that posted a job, the truth is they've done almost nothing.**

When you say, "Hey, you should probably call someone," that is great advice. It just seems so foreign to your child because no one else has ever said that to them before. It's easy for your new grad to say, "You don't know what it's like now." Or perhaps your child is willing to call but isn't sure what to say. Thus, they are afraid to actually pick up the phone.

Technology has its role to play, but there are a lot of misconceptions about what it can actually do for your student or new graduate. Part of our process is to put technology in

## THE NEXT GREAT STEP

its place—as a resource, not the answer. **There is a lot of bad advice out there for new graduates from friends and parents. As a parent, don't make this worse.**

The perfect example of this is a mom who tells her son, “Take a job in the field that I work in so I can make a connection for you.” She’s not interested in him finding a job or an internship that will ultimately be related to his career. The grad may learn some skills in that first role, but if they don't feel aligned to it or have the skills to be successful, they will end up leaving and starting the search all over again.

Often the only work experience some of our clients have had during and after college were jobs that don't traditionally require college degrees such as retail work, delivery driving, or food service. That's okay. There's something in every job your student has done that is useful. For example, working in a restaurant probably meant your child learned how to upsell drinks or dessert to customers. If they scooped ice cream, they learned customer service skills. If they worked as a delivery driver, they learned how to optimize their route. They are learning life skills: working on a team, showing up on time, and dealing with difficult customers.

Most new graduates just do not know how to sell these experiences and skills. A big piece of the Next Great Step program is teaching students how to identify what they've learned and what they can do, and present themselves in the best possible light to employers.

### “What’s My Role Here?”

When parents call, they share many of the struggles and challenges they see their grad having. They pour their hearts out, saying, “I didn’t even know your service existed until this morning. We just found you on Google and feel so relieved to be talking to someone who focuses on this problem.” Often, their new graduate is not quite as on board to participate in our process as the parents are. Nevertheless, the overwhelming emotion we encounter with the parents at the beginning of a new client engagement is relief.

Parents can be very helpful if they know the right questions to ask and can actually help their children figure out their core skills. If you are able to, relax a little bit regarding what you think your child *should* be doing. If you as a parent can approach this process objectively, and try not to be emotional, *you can help*. Perhaps there is an uncle, a cousin, or a family friend who can facilitate this conversation using the framework you’ll find in the chapters ahead. This can provide new grads with structure, as well as fuel for a fire that will energize their careers, not just in the months ahead, but for their whole lives. **Because understanding who you are, what skills you bring to the table, and how to effectively sell them is not just about landing that first job, it’s about creating value over a lifetime.** This process lays a strong foundation they can build on—a foundation they’ll use to eventually land that second job, that big promotion, and beyond.

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Before we get to that, let's consider how your child is feeling about this process. By understanding their fears and mental blocks, you'll find it easier to support them on the road ahead.

### CHAPTER ONE KEY TAKEAWAYS

- One of the biggest misconceptions I hear from parents is the idea that their child's university will "take it from here." Life skills such as networking are not part of the curriculum.
- You are not both looking for their first job. Finding a job is their job—not yours.
- Parents often wish they understood how competitive the process is and that they had seen their new grad begin the job hunt process sooner or had encouraged them to do so.
- When parents are living vicariously through their kids, the kids can sense it, and it makes them less likely to listen, take advice, or follow through on family connections.
- We have to remember to ease up on the subtle pressure we apply as new grads are trying to figure out their lives. They need a little space to figure out what they really want.
- People hire people, not online resumes. If your child is one of 100 or 1,000 new grads who submitted a resume to a company that posted a job, the truth is they've done almost nothing.

## CHAPTER ONE RESOURCE

**College students and their parents believe they have plenty of time** when they're in school to make connections and gain skills. When senior year rolls around, new grads are thoroughly intimidated by the job search. We recommend the following career roadmap ideas which can be implemented regardless of the current stage of your child's journey.

### Career Roadmap

#### Freshman

- » Get involved! Join clubs or participate in activities - at least one related to the major, one for fun.
- » Get to know your professors. Go to office hours or study sessions.
- » Create a resume. It's just a start--use experience from both high school and college.
- » Create a LinkedIn profile and start using LinkedIn to connect with classmates, professors and other contacts.
- » Visit your college career services to learn how they can support you. Focus on securing the summer internship.

**For Sophomore, Junior, and Senior to-do's, please visit:**  
**[nextgreatstep.com/bookresources](http://nextgreatstep.com/bookresources)**