

Parents: Advice your graduating college senior will want to hear.

For college students and their parents, perhaps the only thing more stressful than getting into the right college is what to do after graduation! Parents feel the weights of the moment, too. After all, this senior year is the last in a long and expensive journey with you hope will pay off!



Most seniors who will graduate this spring are already anxious about what lies ahead. Unless they are pre-med or on a professional track, they are searching for answers. Shall I immediately go to graduate school, or work first to get more experience? Is it necessary to have an advanced degree? Who should I trust for advice – my parents, professors, career counselors or friends?

While students are searching for answers, parents are too. Unfortunately for all, it seems everyone has a different opinion on these all-important “first-job-after-college” questions.

Here’s some advice from a seasoned executive search consultant. You can pass this along to your daughters and sons to help them skillfully evaluate their options and make yourself look good as well:

Most young people do not know whether they will be most fulfilled working for a large or small company, but many years of experience in executive-level search tells me this: it is far better to start a career at a large, well-respected company (e.g., GE, Disney, Nike, Enterprise, etc.) even if the responsibilities are a bit narrower and the pay is lower. Why?

- Learning extends well beyond the boundaries of the position that one is hired for. When a recent graduate works for a large company with excellent management and world class business processes, she/he will learn far more about leadership, organization effectiveness and business in general than at a smaller, less sophisticated company.
- Large companies tend to invest more in training and development-vital to helping recent graduates bridge the gap from academia to business. Solid training helps the graduate build a strong foundation of technical knowledge and managerial skills for the future, wherever that may lead.
- Large companies often provide job rotation which is especially good for a young person who is still “experimenting” with career direction and not yet certain what she/he wants to do long-term.

- Small and medium size companies generally prefer to hire experienced executives from large companies to lead them through future growth.
- Large company experience is more attractive to Executive search consultants and in-house recruiters. Recruiters know that large firms choose only the top graduates, and these companies tend to offer excellent management training programs. They surmise that, if a person was selected by a Fortune 1,000 Company, and demonstrated good career progression for at least three to five years, then she/he has a “halo effect.”

College graduates should pursue their passion, whatever it might be, but I truly believe that following this career advice will set the stage for career fulfillment over the long term, whether the ultimate goal is to climb the ranks of a large company, become CEO of a midsize company or own a small business.

Start with a large company and all these options are open to you. Start with a small company and it may be difficult to work up to a midsize or a large company although you could still start your own business. But a resume that includes well-known company experience may give you that edge to get much needed financing for your small business!

College grads are well advised not to chase the highest offer or the most glamorous position, if the company truly doesn't suit them. Instead, they should join a large company, work for an excellent manager (the first boss has a tremendous influence in shaping a young person's management style), establish a track record of success for three to five years and then go elsewhere for the “high dollar,” if they feel they must.

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