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What #firstsevenjobs Says About Today's Young Adults and the Job Market

Published on August 30, 2016 | Featured in: [Careers: Getting Started](#), [Economy](#), [Editor's Picks](#), [Social Media](#)



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2,875



225



43

For the last several weeks, my social media feeds probably like many of yours has been filled with people all over the world listing their first seven jobs. As I read the lists with curiosity, and a few laughs, two trends emerged at least in my feeds. (Granted this is not scientific given I'm in my 40s and many of the people in my feed probably grew up in the 1980s, or even earlier.)

For one, the first few positions in the list were typical jobs that kids growing up in my generation had, usually during the summer: lifeguard, mowing lawns, delivering papers, or working for McDonald's, the Gap, or Dairy Queen (or name any ice cream shop).



Cam Guthrie @CamGuthrie · Aug 22

My [#FirstSevenJobs](#)

1. Paperboy
2. Snow Shovelling
3. Pizza Hut
4. Kinney Shoes
5. Bicycle Store
6. Insurance Broker
7. Mayor of [#Guelph](#)



5



73



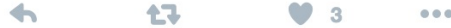


was an eclectic mix of occupations or gigs that clearly showed they were starting at the bottom (mailroom clerk was somewhere in many lists).



Jennifer Robinson @jlrabi21 · Aug 20

Babysitter, Vegetable seller, Waitress/Cook/Gas Jockey, Toy Store, Library Shelver, Library Assistant, Librarian [#firstsevenjobs](#)



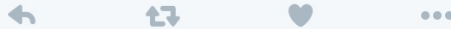
I imagine that if this hashtag reappears a decade from now, we will see very different lists from people in their 40s. In reporting my new book, *There Is Life After College*, over the past few years, I found that how young adults approach the job market today, and more important, how they prepare for it has changed drastically in the two decades since I graduated from college.



Terrence Millie @terrymillie · Aug 20

[#firstsevenjobs](#)

Roofing nail collector
Paperboy
Camp worker
Bike builder
store clerk @ Z
Camera operator channel8
Audience assistant @CBC



And nothing more than the two trends I identified in my feed show how the run-up to a career has shifted for today's teenagers and 20somethings.

Many students now enter college without ever having held a part-time job in high school. The number of teenagers who have some sort of job while in school has dropped from nearly 40 percent in 1990 to just 20 percent today, an all-time low since the United States started keeping track in 1948.

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Some of that can be blamed on a lackluster youth job market, of course, but most teenagers are unemployed by choice. In upper-middle-class and wealthy neighborhoods, in particular, they are too busy doing other things—playing sports, studying, and following a full schedule of activities booked by their parents.



your career field. Research has shown that students who are employed while in high school or college allocate their time more efficiently, learn about workplace norms and responsibilities, and are motivated to study harder in their classes so they can achieve a certain career goal.

Once in college, students are much more focused on specific careers, even jobs, choosing narrowly tailored majors that train them for work. Fewer students and parents see college as a place to explore interests and potential careers, and for good reason—college is expensive.

Once out of college, there is a desire to start out fast and move up the career ladder quickly. That often means picking an occupation and a company and staying on a pre-determined pathway the employer has laid out. While 20somethings still switch jobs often, there is less jumping between occupations to test them out. Now job hopping is all about moving up, following the path that someone else has laid out and plenty of others have followed.

So many young adults I met in my reporting were focused on getting the next job that they didn't want to wait to see if anything else was waiting for them around the bend. They couldn't tell a coherent career narrative, and when they did, it lacked authenticity.

Employers today are looking for the why behind the decisions job applicants have made in their careers and how the situations they faced before might compare with ones they will confront on the job. To employers, the why shows intent and drive.

It also shows them that you are able to connect the dots between your experiences. How did one internship you had led to another? Why did you decide to take a detour by going on a gap year or even reverse course by changing majors? Why did you stay in that job for less than one year?

In many ways, I can't blame today's college graduates as the job market they are entering is quickly changing, as occupations and entire careers are expanding and contracting at an alarming speed. But as I think about my own #firstsevenjobs, I can't help to think about how the odd teenage jobs and the detours to places I never imagined working helped shaped the career I have today.

#firstsevenjobs: Mowing lawns, hospital cafeteria, AAA TripTiks, Inventory clerk for department store, Writing coach, Computer lab monitor, Newspaper reporter

Jeffrey Selingo is author of the new book, [There Is Life After College](#). You can follow his writing here, on Twitter [@jselingo](#), on [Facebook](#), and sign up for free newsletters about the future of higher education at [jeffselingo.com](#).



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