

FOR RECENT GRADS, A PLAN FOR DIFFICUT TIMES

REAL MONEY column for The Santa Fe New Mexican

By Rob Rikoon

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Many young people are having great difficulty finding jobs and their employment outlook is bleak. Private companies, along with government organizations, will continue to reduce the number of positions available. People with jobs are looking to stay on as long as they can since the prospects for a comfortable retirement are dimmer than at any other time since WWII.

We are not alone. Europe has faced these circumstances for thirty years, albeit with the aid of a wide social safety net. Now that the net is frayed, given several EU nations piling up of national debt, college education may soon cease to be free there as it has been for decades. For recent graduates to feel excited about the future and not be dragged down by the pressure of paying off excessive debt, a nation has to have an expanding economy that creates an atmosphere of hope and opportunity.

One place where this is not happening is Ireland, which is experiencing an emigration of many of its ambitious and bright young people. If this continues, it will take generations for Ireland to recover. Ireland's new government may refuse to pay off its national debts so as to stave off this unfolding disaster. Could this occur in other countries? Here?

For America's next generation to lead productive work lives, I offer some advice:

First, no matter what field you studied in school, find something you can do immediately which is useful to others, is in fairly steady demand no matter what shape the economy is in and that it pays decently. It is best if you can do it part-time and on a flexible schedule so you can develop other opportunities. Examples: cooking, massage, yard maintenance, cutting hair, doing nails, sewing alterations, minor house repairs, childcare, waiting tables, tutoring high school students, and eldercare. Put the word out that you are available every way you can.

Second, pursue your real passion in a creative way by finding a mentor and/or volunteering somewhere people are doing what you would love to do. Apprenticeships of any kind are invaluable, no matter what you end up pursuing. This kind of non-money oriented effort will result in the best kind of networking.

Third, get your expenses down. Trade with your neighbors, friends, and family for as many of your needs as possible. Sign up for a Time Bank in your area. Live with a family by converting a garage, basement, or shed into a hospitable apartment.

Fourth, pay off your debts and don't drink too much. It is impossible to combine partying and work so if you want to stay sharp, schedule some exercise into your routine. Sports are a great way to make helpful friends.

Fifth, take a course in a new field. Artists should take bookkeeping while business majors would benefit from studying psychology and history classes. The reason is that most good jobs require multiple skills, a willingness to take on new things, a positive attitude and the ability to get along well with others from different backgrounds. Traveling to other cultures on a bare bones budget show initiative, resourcefulness and an ability to be self-reliant. Try not to specialize too early as the best employers I know want well-rounded people who are not afraid to try new things.

Once you put together your own multi faceted work life, chances are good you will have already achieved an important slice of the American Dream, which is that your time is your own. Opportunities will appear in unpredictable ways. If you can build your own base, put your heart into what you believe in and apply yourself patiently, career and money will follow.

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