

3rd Edition, Revised and Updated



# Major in Success

**Make College Easier,  
Fire Up Your Dreams, and  
Get a Very Cool Job**

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"You're about to read a book about  
true success—success in college,  
in your career, and in life."

—Jack Canfield

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**Patrick Combs**

With a foreword by Jack Canfield,  
co-author of *Chicken Soup for the Soul*



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*Make College Easier, Fire Up Your Dreams,  
and Get a Very Cool Job*

PATRICK COMBS



TEN SPEED PRESS  
Berkeley Toronto

**T***o my mother, Nancy “Mom” Combs, to whom I owe my most excellent upbringing. Mom, you taught me the most valuable lessons of all—“You can be anything you want;” “Don’t worry about your mistakes;” “Be kind to others;” and “Look it up, that’s what I bought the encyclopedias for.”*

*To Deborah Lowe, the world’s best professor. Deborah, the gifts you gave me keep on giving from the pages of this book. Thank you for so much.*

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## This Book Can Transform Your Future

Foreword by Jack Canfield, co-author of the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series

**Y**ou're about to read a book about true success—success in college, in your career, and in life.

But it's not your usual book about getting good grades and landing a high-paying job. For Patrick Combs, that's not nearly enough. And he hopes that once you've read the first few pages of this book, it won't be enough for you, either.

*Major in Success* is about living a radically successful life. This means landing (or creating) your dream job right out of college, or soon thereafter. It means living a life that brings you real joy, meaning, and satisfaction—not just a good-paying job. And, most importantly, it means starting to fulfill your dreams *right now*—not months or years down the road.

I know Patrick's approach and principles work, for several reasons. First, because people who follow Patrick's guidance radically succeed—in some cases beyond their wildest dreams. (This new edition of *Major in Success* contains many of these people's real-life stories.)

Second, because Patrick has walked his talk. By the age of 28, he was already working at his own dream job as a speaker on college campuses, writing books and columns on the side, and living the life he had envisioned for himself.

Third, because Patrick has a well-earned and well-deserved reputation as a speaker and writer. He has shared his wisdom, encouragement, and energy with tens of thousands of students at hundreds of colleges and universities around the country. His award-winning Web site, [www.goodthink.com](http://www.goodthink.com), has inspired hundreds of thousands of people of all ages. And the first two editions of *Major in Success* have helped an untold number of students get a jump-start on creating the lives they most want to live.

And fourth, I know from my own experience that what Patrick writes is true. Of course, *Major in Success* wasn't available back when I was in college (though I wish it had been). Nevertheless—through intuition, grace, or blind luck—I was fortunate enough to have followed many of Patrick's principles, and they have made an enormous difference in my life. One of the most important of these, for me, was focusing on what I loved to do; another was persisting in spite of my fears and failures.

I'm living proof of how important these principles can be. It may surprise you to know that the first volume of *Chicken Soup for the Soul* was rejected by quite a few New York presses before finding a home with a small publisher in Florida. If Mark Victor Hansen (my co-author) and I had given in to our fears—or had agreed with the unenthusiastic publishers in New York—none of the *Chicken Soup* books would have been published.

Fortunately, with this new edition of *Major in Success*, you have the chance to benefit from everything Patrick has to offer. So turn the page and let Patrick show you how you can live your dreams, become the person you most want to become, and get on the fast track to your own greatness.

JACK CANFIELD  
February 1999

# Introduction

The college system assumes that knowledge is power. But knowledge isn't power. The ability to put knowledge to use is power.

This book was written especially for all the students who feel similar to the sophomore who told me:

*I came to college and thought it was going to teach me everything I needed to know. And I'm the kind of student who reads all my assignments, goes to class, really listens and works hard at my homework. But two years into it I'm beginning to realize that college isn't teaching me what I need to know—just like high school didn't. And I'm afraid that if I don't do something different, I'm going to graduate with very little helpful knowledge.*

You can be as successful as you want. You can get your dream job and you can establish your ideal lifestyle. You'll see evidence for this throughout the pages of this book in the stories of ordinary students who have gone on to get their dream jobs because of a few good moves they made while they were still in school.

But you are at risk! Consider the fact that research done during the last decade revealed that upwards of 70 percent of all white collar workers are dissatisfied with their jobs. In other words, most college grads are ending up in jobs they don't like—jobs that don't light their fire.

This may come as a shock to you since most students are under the impression that picking a suitable major, getting high grades, and completing a degree will result in a good job. But that promise is simply not true. People who graduate with honors are ending up in jobs they dread.

Remember not all the faculty have all their faculties.

1,001 Logical Laws by John Peers

Most of us have lives too small for our spirits.

Studs Terkel

It's not good grades we're looking for, it's more of a personality type. We're looking for people who can think, lead, make decisions, and sell themselves.

*Business recruiter*

Dude, we gotta win that contest... There's no way we can raise a family on the money we make at Pretzel 'n' Cheese.

*Bill, Bill and Ted's Bogus Journey (film)*

Ninety-eight out of every hundred people working for wages today are in the positions they hold because they lacked the definiteness of decision to plan a definite position....

*Napoleon Hill, Think and Grow Rich*

Simply put: College won't teach you how to fire up your career. Because you are at risk, *Major in Success* is loaded with suggestions that virtually ensure that you'll get a great job at graduation by providing you with a simple, powerful success plan which will move you out of the "risk" category and into a good life.

Here's another bonus: *Major in Success* is designed to alleviate one of the biggest problems you and a million other college students face—feeling uncertain about why you're attending college at all.

People end up in college for a lot of different reasons: because they want a good education, because they wanted to get away from their parents, because everyone else was going, because their parents insisted, because it's what their siblings did, etc. But shortly into the first semester, many students begin to ponder the questions, "Why am I here?" "Am I here to get good grades?" "Am I here to build a career?" "Am I



At a Glance: Copyright by Michael Saporito. Used by permission

Duel of the non-marketable.

supposed to just learn all I can from my professors?” “Or to get a credential?”

**Why are you in college? One good reason is that ultimately, college will give you the opportunity to increase the quality of your life, both now and in the future.** Unfortunately, a lot of students do little, if anything, to actively increase the quality of their lives while they’re in school. Many students seem to think that college is some kind of a rehearsal and they won’t start improving their lives until after they graduate. They don’t seem to realize **that life isn’t a rehearsal—and neither is college.**

From day one when you start college your future resume has started to take shape, whether you’re working to put anything impressive on it or not. Your career is already being determined, whether or not you’re directing it. Even your lifestyle is already taking shape, whether or not you’re consciously trying to shape it the way you want it to be.

The fact is that it’s dangerous to be in college, as a lot of students are, just to achieve in academics. There’s the danger of focusing only on classroom learning because once you’re in the work world, you will be required to have real-world experience. Moreover, as you’ll see later on in the book, you can get good grades but still not be able to get a good job. On the other hand, it is also detrimental to focus only on getting a job while you’re in school because, even though you may become a great candidate for employment, college itself does have a lot to offer.

The most dangerous way to approach college is with the idea that all you need to do is pay your dues and get your degree. If you approach college with this mindset you are shooting yourself in both feet. After graduating, you’ll discover that you were paying dues to get into a club of people who missed the point. **The point is that you’re not in college to work for your professors, or your parents, or anyone else. You’re there to work for yourself and your future.**

Working for yourself and for your future is the central focus of *Major in Success*. The book isn’t just geared to get you a job. Neither is it geared to get you good grades, nor to make college fun, or to expand your horizons, or to help you develop your talents. It’s not even aimed at helping you get the most out of college. *Major in Success* is set up to help you increase the quality of your life, during college and after college. Better still is that almost every tip in the book is good for your career and good for your academics.

You will have to learn seven to ten different jobs to remain employable throughout your lifetime.

Everybody needs some inspiration,  
Everybody needs some motivation,  
mix it up with some imagination,  
and use your natural gifts,  
You’ve got natural gifts.

Lyrics from “Natural Gifts”  
by The Kinks



You kind of have a very short window, which is your four years of college to go crazy, and everyone should go crazy in their life.

Chris Miller, co-author  
of Animal House

Don't worry about moving slowly, worry about standing still.

Chinese proverb

Granted, the book may seem like it's mostly about setting up for a fulfilling career. That is a primary conversation throughout this book and it's no accident. Consider the fact that after graduating from college you will work 70 percent of your waking hours for the next forty-some years. There's no getting around it. Unless you win the lottery or happen to have been born filthy rich, your career will be most of what you do during your life.

The good news is that there are a lot of people who have found ways to establish careers doing the things that make them happy and fulfilled. Their stories, as well as suggestions for creating success in your own life, are in this book.

I'll be describing how to set yourself up for success in detail, complete with step-by-step instructions, later on in the book. But here's a quick preview of what a success plan looks like.

I don't know if Mom was right or Lieutenant Dan—if we both have a destiny or if we're all floating accidentally like on a breeze, but I think maybe it's both.

Forrest Gump

## COLLEGE DROPOUT URNS BAD



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College. Copyright by Dan Killeen. Used by permission.

## 1. Go to college

The first step toward success is to get into college because college really is the **best place you can go to learn, practice, and make something of yourself**. College is rich in resources, people, advisors, and learning tools. And in our society, a diploma is the piece of paper that gives you access to better jobs. But yeah, yeah, yeah, you already know college is a good thing to do but you also know that college doesn't necessarily result in a great job. You've seen how many college graduates are struggling to find meaningful employment. That's why there are three more steps to being successful.

If your goal is to have your own life, don't lean up against a wall waiting for someone to recognize you.

Andrew Shue, actor

## 2. Discover what kind of work you enjoy

The second step is to **get a clear sense of what naturally motivates you the most and then develop a picture of the jobs that suit your interests**. Accomplish this part of the plan and you'll be able to direct all your enthusiasm toward accomplishing your dreams. Skip this step and you're a candidate for getting a job you hate which makes you feel like a slave.

If you are who you want to be  
you'll make it allright  
You won't find a way to be free if  
you never try

Lyrics from the song "Life's for Living" by Jerry Wagers

## 3. Do things that get the ball rolling

The third step is to **acquire the knowledge and experience that will qualify you for your dream job**. There are a surprising number of things you can do toward this end during college. As you accomplish these things, your confidence increases, your success speeds up, and your value in the working world goes through the roof.

It is the first of all problems for  
a man to find out what kind of  
work he is to do in this universe.

Thomas Carlyle,  
essayist and historian

## 4. Master the habits that make you unstoppable

The last step in the plan is where the rubber meets the road. The previous three steps are like training and preparing for a race. In the last step **you start running and give it your best shot**. When you're at this phase in the plan, things will look very different. You'll have different options to choose from and you'll see many possible routes to your dream job. You'll also have acquired many of the skills, traits, and abilities that will get you to the job of your dreams—and ultimately provide you with a meaningful life.

As you can see, it's not a complicated path to success, but it does focus on what's really important: *motivation, skills, abilities, resources, credentials, and your dreams*. It's the same path that got many former college students to where they wanted to be, including David Letterman, Katie Couric, Tom Hanks, Oprah Winfrey, Robin Williams, Nancy Collins, Bill Gates, and Tabitha Soren. In the next part of the book, for example, you'll learn:

- How Tabitha Soren landed her dream job co-anchoring MTV news;
- What finally convinced Tom Hanks to pursue acting;
- How Katie Couric got to the *Today Show*;
- What David Letterman did during college to get his start in television;
- What enabled John Singleton to direct his own movie just out of college;
- How Jay Leno got past a major setback and ended up hosting the *Tonight Show*;
- How celebrity interviewer Nancy Collins got her first big interview during her senior year in college;
- How David Duchovny finally figured out he wanted to be an actor;
- The step Conan O'Brien took during college that put him on track to his TV show;
- How Marcus Allen overcame his biggest fear.

to be nobody but yourself—in a world which is doing its best, night and day, to make you like everybody else—means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight, and never stop fighting.

e.e. cummings, poet

In addition, you'll also find inspiring stories of lesser-known recent graduates who did well for themselves by making choices you'll probably see as possible for yourself. You'll learn about:

- David Greene, who ended up being part owner of a company because of one informational interview;
- Randy Kelson, who got his dream job playing video games because he decided to call the company that made his favorite games;
- Veronica Chambers, who got her own column in a nationally circulated magazine during college by cold calling from the New York phone book;
- Wendy Kopp, who established a major national non-profit organization just after college because she turned her senior paper into a business plan;
- Michael Elliot, who got his dream job in Hollywood with a quick trip to his career center;
- Tiffany Shlain, who was able to make award-winning films during and after college by seeking out her own mentors.

You don't need to read this book as a list of tasks you should be doing while you're in college. Instead, look at it as offering possibilities to explore in your own life. It is a reality that all of us can be great at something. And although the entire book is about succeeding both professionally and academically, let me repeat the underlying philosophy of *Major in Success*: Do things that increase your enjoyment of life.

So start the book and enjoy.

To improve the golden moment of opportunity and catch the good that is within our reach is the great art of life.

*Samuel Johnson, author*

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PART 1

*Dream Job*

I hope to die young at a very old age.

*Anonymous*



## CHAPTER 1

# *On the Road to Greatness*

You've got to get a kick out of whatever you're doing. I'd rather see you as a happy UPS driver enjoying your customers than a miserable senior accountant at a Fortune 500 company making \$70,000 a year. You only get one trip around so you've got to enjoy what you do and who you do it with.

*Tom Peters, management expert*

Think of the students around you. What personal characteristic do you think will make the difference between those who become great at something and those who never rise above mediocrity? Intelligence? Family background? Confidence?

The answer is surprising. Benjamin Bloom, a professor at the University of Chicago, recently studied 120 outstanding athletes, artists, and scholars. He was looking for the common denominators of greatness and mastery. The study concluded that intelligence and family background were NOT important characteristics for achieving mastery of a desired skill. The only characteristic that the 120 outstanding people had in common was **extraordinary drive**.

Extraordinary drive is the primary characteristic that powered Jay Leno through 22 years of stand-up comedy before being chosen to succeed Johnny Carson. It's the quality that took Katie Couric from her first job out of college as a desk assistant for ABC, making coffee and answering phones, to the position of cohost of the NBC *Today Show*. It's also the primary quality that enabled John Singleton to write three full-length movie scripts during college, one of which was his hit movie, *Boyz n the Hood*.

I never worked at anything that wasn't fun. If I had my life to live over I don't think I'd change a thing, except maybe to take up mountain climbing.

*AC Gilbert, gold medal pole-vault champion 1908, self-made millionaire, and creator of the Erector Set*

Anything you do, you better enjoy it for its true value. Because people are going to second-guess everything you do.

*Bill Gates*





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I really think I've been successful because I loved the job. I like reporting, I like interviewing people. I never wanted to be a famous journalist, I wanted to be a good journalist, respected by my peers.

Katie Couric,  
cohost of NBC's Today Show

The real secret of success is enthusiasm.

Walter Chrysler, entrepreneur

Profound joy of the heart is like a magnet that indicates the path of life.

Mother Teresa, nun

Most successful people enjoy their work. The real issue is not what's "hot" but what you like to do.

Jeffrey Allen, writer

**Extraordinary drive is exactly what you need to succeed.** . . . "Extraordinary drive" is the magic ingredient that will make your dreams come true. . . . All you need is a little "superhuman ambition" and the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow is yours! Well then, maybe you'd like to know where extraordinary drive comes from. **EXTRAORDINARY DRIVE COMES FROM DOING WHAT YOU ENJOY.** Doing what you love. Going with your strongest interests. Trying for your deepest aspirations.

There is research that proves the power of doing what you enjoy. Srully Blotnick focused his study on middle class workers and published his results in his book *Getting Rich Your Own Way*. Fifteen hundred people were asked about the career goals they'd set for themselves and then followed for 20 years. Eighty-three percent chose their career based on making the most money. They hoped to get rich fast in order to later do work they really wanted to. Seventeen percent of the workers chose their careers out of passion—figuring they would worry about the money later. At the end of 20 years, there were 101 millionaires from the entire group. All but one of the millionaires—100 out of 101—were from the 17 percent who had chosen to follow their passion. The other 83 percent who were trying hard to get rich fast spent 20 years making only modest earnings, in jobs they didn't particularly like. On the other hand, whether they ended up a millionaire or not, almost all the **passion-driven workers enjoyed long careers in jobs they found "profoundly absorbing."**

## Why doing what you enjoy is so powerful

Doing what you enjoy propels you to success. How it propels you to success is simple. Success in any endeavor takes a lot of