

MAJOR IN SUCCESS

**Make College Easier,
Beat The System, &
Get A Very Cool Job**

Patrick Combs



Major in Success

*Make College Easier, Beat the System,
and Get a Very Cool Job*

PATRICK COMBS



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Finally to Jennifer Jones and Kenny Fields. May you have the brightest of futures.

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! Of college graduates, 50% don't get their dream jobs. Instead, they get a McJob—what novelist Douglas Coupland defined as a low pay, low benefits, low prestige, no future job.

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 stacking grocery shelves across the country.

Our answer to the famous question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" is "Employed."
Joanne Gordon, Chicago

Many of us are aware that a greater life is possible. We sense that we have scarcely realized our potential, our powers, and that there lies vast continents, strange and wonderful worlds of unexplored territory within.

Michael Lynberg, author of
The Gift of Giving (Fawcett, 1991)

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)

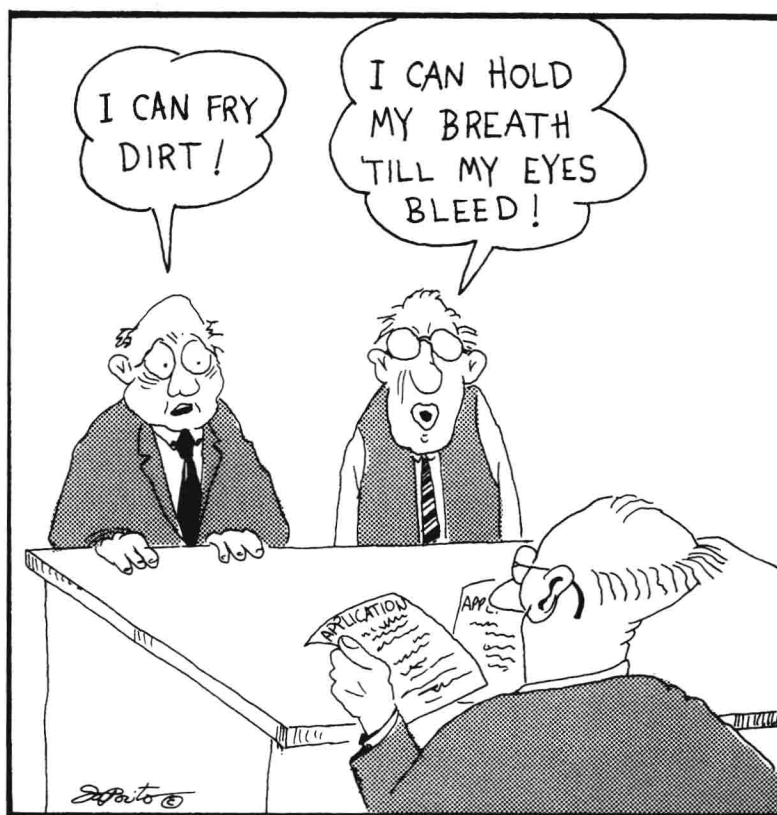
Perhaps the cruelest joke played on our generation is the general belief that if you went to college, you'll get a job and be upwardly mobile.

Steven Gibb, Twentysomething (book)

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 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. Its 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

It is not by accident that the happiest people are those who make a conscious effort to live useful lives. Their happiness, of course, is not a shallow exhilaration where life is one continuous intoxicating party. Rather, their happiness is a deep sense of inner peace that comes when they believe their lives have meaning and that they are making a difference for good in the world.

Ernest Fitzgerald

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.

COLLEGE DROPOUT URNS BAD



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College. Copyright by Dan Killeen. Used by permission.

1. Go to college

The first step towards 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

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

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

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*

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.

3. Do things that get the ball rolling

The third step is to acquire the knowledge and experience which 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.

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.

I learned at least this by my experiments. That if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet a success unexpected in common hours.

Henry David Thoreau, writer

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, Daryl Hannah, Andrew Shue, and Tabitha Soren. In the next part of the book, for example, you'll learn:

- How Tabitha Soren landed her dream job coanchoring 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;
- What steps Andrew Shue took to land a starring role in a hit television series.

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;
- Jennifer Scully, who got a prestigious job in the White House by volunteering repeatedly;
- 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

Table of Contents

Special Thanks	v
Introduction	ix
 Part 1: Dream Job	 1
Chapter 1: On the Road to Greatness	3
Chapter 2: Truly Interesting	8
Chapter 3: Major Excitement	13
Chapter 4: No McJobs!	15
Chapter 5: Your Ultimate Achievement	21
Chapter 6: The Five Big Fears	24
 Part 2: Action Plan	 31
Chapter 7: Great Escapes	33
Chapter 8: Work Hard, Play Hard	39
Chapter 9: Never Mind the Grades	45
Chapter 10: Classes Worth Their Weight in Gold	52
Chapter 11: More, Better, Faster, Digital	57
Chapter 12: Excel-eration Training	62
Chapter 13: A Major Shortcut	67
Chapter 14: Life-Changing Reality Checks	72
Chapter 15: Really Get into It	75
Chapter 16: Show and Tell	82
Chapter 17: Going Pro	87
Chapter 18: School without an Internship Can Get You Nowhere	92
Chapter 19: The Surefire, Nine-Step, Ultra Interview Plan	99
Chapter 20: Future-Perfect Planning	105
Chapter 21: Now Get Out There!	108
 Part 3: High Octane	 113
Chapter 22: Focus—and Focus on What You Care About	115
Chapter 23: Make Bold Decisions	118
Chapter 24: Commit Yourself to Taking the Time to Make Your Dreams Come True	121
Chapter 25: Break Through Your Failures	124
Chapter 26: Pay Yourself 10% First and Always	128
Chapter 27: Be Good to Others	131
Chapter 28: Bon Voyage!	135
 Bonus Appendix	 137

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

There are only two realities in life, death and laughter. We can do nothing to change the former; so we might as well do all we can to save the latter.

John F. Kennedy, former U.S. president



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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. One has to follow it, even though one enters into a way full of difficulties.

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.

When he was young, Jay Leno's two loves were cars and comedy. Katie Couric thinks she's successful primarily because she loves her job of reporting and interviewing people. As for John Singleton, making movies was a dream come true, one he'd had since he was a kid watching movies play on a 70-foot drive-in movie screen outside his window.

The testimonials to the power of doing what you enjoy or dream about don't end there. Mary Ainsworth, a leading development psychologist said, "I've always loved doing the research. The idea that I would get an article published or that my name would become known was never as exciting to me as the research itself." Robin Williams described the year in college that he flunked out of political science but discovered improv theater. "Everything opened up. The whole world just changed in that one year." Oprah Winfrey hosted a talk show and liked it so much she said, "This is what I should be doing. It's like breathing." Top-notch celebrity interviewer Nancy Collins recalls the excitement she felt after her first interview. "I had found It. The thing I loved doing more than anything else in the world." When discussing his success, David Letterman said, "All I ever wanted was to have my own television show."