

PART I

THE BREAKDOWN

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EVERYONE
POOPS. YOURS
ISN'T SPECIAL

When our parents came of age in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, working for “The Man” was the only game in town. Our grandparents—mostly members of the Great Depression generations for whom jobs were considered luxuries—reinforced the ideas that getting a job and working hard were essential to building a sustainable living.

Thus, the mantra was born: Work hard, get good grades, go to college, and get a job.

Before we were even born, our parents fantasized about what we would be when we grew up. They wanted things to be better for us, but in a much different way than their parents had planned for them. There was a generational divide here: To our grandparents, getting a job was a matter of survival. But our parents wanted more than survival for us—they wanted us to find our dream job and thrive. We couldn’t just get *any* job—they had much bigger ideas for us. They wanted us to find a cure for a disease, write the next great American novel, or become president of the United States. The possibilities seemed endless. Their expectations ran wild and knew no bounds. Before the doctor even cut our umbilical cords, we were already winners who were destined to surpass their wildest dreams—even though they had no idea what that meant or how we could even begin to make their dreams a reality.

And, then the big day arrived. You might have entered the world as an 8-pound ton-of-fun with a face that scared off the family dog, but it didn’t matter. The moment you left the womb, you were a special, perfect, one-in-a-million diamond-in-the-rough who would one day perform open-heart surgery blindfolded, while climbing Everest.

From that day forward, the world revolved around your every action. You giggled, and your parents thought it was brilliant. You rolled over, and you were amazing. When you walked, they told everyone who would listen how incredible you were. You mumbled some incoherent iteration of “mom” or “dad” that sounded more like “bus stop”—and it was *life changing*. Relatives would even line up to clean your diaper just to get a whiff of your majestic, rosy fragrant poop.

And the adoration didn't end at infancy.

It was time to call the NBA when you *almost* hit that foul shot during your fourth-grade basketball scrimmage. Graduating from middle school was a crowning achievement. And when you made your singing debut in the high school musical's background ensemble, your parents swore that you were on your way to Broadway.

For years, your parents, teachers, and MTV blew smoke up your ass at every turn. You were showered with undeserved accolades, encouraged to aspire to unrealistic goals, and praised for exaggerated achievements. You were the unwitting victim of a coddling culture fated to screw up your perception of reality.

No matter how pathetic the award or how asinine the proverb, you bought into it all, hook, line, and sinker. You were so busy riding the Everyone-Is-a-Winner bandwagon that you failed to realize that you were being rewarded for mediocrity—or worse, out of pity. Your parents put you on a teetering pedestal, instead of providing you a strong and realistic foundation for the rest of your life. Encouraging you to aim high is one thing, but by keeping you from feeling the sting of failure—and not allowing you space to fend for yourself independently—your parents, teachers, and coaches unknowingly set you up to be a weak, ineffectual person, unprepared for adulthood.

COLLEGE: THE DRUNKEN ROAD TO EASY STREET

From your time in the cradle, up to high school graduation, you were likely force-fed everything from *Sesame Street* to SAT prep courses. You were pushed to read faster, be smarter, and raise your GPA in the hopes that one day you'd be accepted into a top-rated college—and that would set you up for life.

But rather than instilling the desire to pursue a “real” job, college taught you to hate them. Most professors were open-minded thought leaders who encouraged discussion. Unlike the mandated dress codes in primary and secondary schools, college promoted a sense of individuality and expression. No one dictated where or how you worked, as long as you got the work done. Cheating or achieving grades so low that teachers began to question whether you had a pulse were two of very few reasons you might be expelled—which were better odds than hoping for job security.

When you did manage to find the time to pay attention or even make it to class, you probably realized that your classes weren't offering you the critical skills necessary for the real world. College courses seemed to train you for the same mythical dream job your parents desired for you. There were no lectures on corporate hierarchy, filing documents, or answering phones. When you weren't wasting time taking classes that were about as useful as a screen door on a submarine, you were receiving a high-level education that taught you how to do your eventual employer's job, not the remedial tasks of his entry-level assistant. Simply put, you were told *what* to think—not *how* to think.

Instead of breaking free from the system and taking control of your own life, you took the easy road. You decided to allow your perception of reality to remain warped, because you knew you had a reward just waiting to be cashed in. Your BS in BS was your meal ticket to superior job placement and untold riches.

Or so you thought.

DUDE, WHERE'S MY DREAM JOB?

The years passed by so fast that before you knew it, you were finishing up your senior year of college. In a few short months you'd be pants-less, wearing a cap and gown, accepting a six-figure sheet of oak tag, and finding yourself one step closer to retirement by thirty. All of the B- term papers and drunken debauchery was finally going to pay off. It was time to get paid!

You typed up your resume in 12-point Times New Roman with your name centered at the top in bold caps. You grossly exaggerated your internship experience and gave yourself the title of VP of Operations, Marketing, and Accounting. You printed the document on 110-pound scented yellow stationery and—along with your formulaic cover letter—proudly handed the completed package to your career development counselor for her seal of approval. I'm sure there was a tear in his or her eye. You then proceeded to send resumes to all of the best employers you could find on the Web. The excitement was palpable. It was time to accept your dream job.

A few weeks went by, and you didn't hear anything—but you didn't let that scare you. You had an *accredited* degree. But still, where was the harm in hedging your bets? So you sent out 10 more resumes.

A few more weeks passed. No responses.

No problem, though, right? It was only a matter of time before someone contacted you to schedule an interview. After all, you followed your life plan to the *decimal*. You got good grades, and were accepted into college—now the next step was to get the job of your dreams. Right? But just to be sure, you sent out a few more resumes. Not too many. Just 75 or so . . . you know, to be on the safe side.

There's a good possibility that if you graduated several years ago, you applied for a bunch of corporate gigs and still haven't heard back from any employers. You're not alone. Juan Somavia, the Director-General of the UN International Labour

Organization, has recently announced that global youth unemployment has hit its highest levels ever, with 81 million young people unemployed worldwide. According to a 2009 National Association of Colleges and Employers study, 80 percent of college graduates who were looking for jobs couldn't find one. The Economic Policy Institute recently announced that the class of 2010 faces the worse job market in a generation, with the Bureau of Labor Statistics putting unemployment among 19- to 24-year-olds over 15 percent. Even more disturbing is the recent study by the Pew Research Center indicating that nearly 40 percent of all 18- to 29-year-olds have either been unemployed or underemployed at some point since December 2007.

If you did hear from a potential employer, there's a fairly good chance you were denied a position because you were either underqualified for the jobs you wanted or overqualified for the jobs you applied for "just to make ends meet." It didn't matter if you had a degree in electrical engineering—you'd be lucky to get an executive assistant gig at a corporate event planning company, if you got a job at all.

But there *is* a silver lining. You're now a card-carrying member of the Boomerang Club: The first generation in history to attend college only to move back in with dear old mom and dad afterward because you're broke, unemployed, and in debt up to your eyeballs.

Hooray for living the dream!

I'm sure this is *exactly* how you envisioned your postcollegiate life.

WELCOME TO YOUR "REAL" JOB, MR. JANITOR

Maybe you were "fortunate" and did manage to land a job after college. However, chances are that whatever you're currently doing was not your first choice. It's probably not even your 10th or 20th choice. Heck, it's probably not even your *100th* choice. Instead of being hired as the vice president of

fashion design at Ralph Lauren, you most likely accepted a receptionist gig at Joey Fatayat's Mortuary where the motto "You Kill 'Em, We Chill 'Em" is proudly displayed on a neon sign in the parking lot. (I'm sure they have a *wonderful* health insurance plan.)

And if, by some miracle, you were lucky enough to get a job in your chosen field, then you're most likely grinding it out as an underappreciated, underpaid, underemployed, bottom-of-the-food-chain receptionist-barista-gopher, who often gets mistaken for the company intern.

What happened to the dream job that was dangled in front of you like a carrot on a stick for your entire life?

You departed college with the notion that you were regularly going to make life and death decisions and close billion dollar deals over dinner meetings. So how is it, exactly, that you ended up sitting in a cubicle typing up your supervisor's meeting agenda, staring at a slow ticking wall clock, and wondering where it all went wrong? Where was your standing ovation for handing in your work early? Or the certificate for being on time every morning? How about the corner office with a view or the "important" responsibilities?

Where is your "A" for effort?

Claustrophobic cubicles, stale coffee, monotone dress codes, idiot bosses, mind-numbing water cooler debates, migraine-inducing birthday celebrations, infantile office politics, futile reports, repetitive phone answering protocols . . . the only thing stopping you from running down the hallway screaming like a madman is the thought of being forced to attend the human resource department's new multicultural anger management seminar.

Truth be told, whether your collar is blue or white, your "real" job is probably everything you never wanted it to be—and you're not alone. More people than ever are less than pleased with their current positions. In fact, according to a recent study conducted by the Conference Board, 45 percent of Americans

hate their jobs, and—perhaps more shocking—73 percent of Americans under the age of 25 hate their jobs. If that many people are so completely miserable doing what they do on a daily basis . . . well, doesn't that tell you something about how broken the system is? Despite the encouragement you received (and still receive) to get one, "real" jobs present a problem for the following reasons:

Real jobs offer you a false sense of security. You've been conditioned to believe that a real job will offer you safety and security. However, the truth is that job security no longer exists—and it hasn't for a long time.

Consider the numerous corporations that went bankrupt in the 2000s where the decisions of the few greatly impacted the livelihoods of the many: Enron, Lehman Brothers, Circuit City, Linens 'N Things, General Motors, and so on. The list is frustratingly endless. Forget about gold watches and retirement lunches; in many cases, loyal employees didn't even receive severance or a shred of their decimated retirement savings. And let's not forget about the recession that has forced companies to lay off millions of employees—nearly 1 in 10, in some instances—just to maintain viability . . . and has caused the unemployment rate to escalate to levels that haven't been seen since the Great Depression.

Detractors may argue that employees benefit from more security than entrepreneurs do. Yet although entrepreneurs understand the risks they're taking in terms of their financial security, they still maintain total control over its direction. People with "real" jobs have very little—if any—say over financial and job security. The list of factors that can send you packing will only grow as employers continue to perfect their "better, faster, cheaper" philosophy to keep stockholders happy or increase top-level executive pay. There is only one thing that will undoubtedly become more and more commonplace: pink slips.

Real jobs render you powerless. Clueless management. Moronic colleagues. Tedious reports. Unrealistic deadlines.

What do all of these things have in common? It's simple: No one wants or cares about your opinion on *any* of them. Your job is to keep your head down and get whatever needs handling done—no questions asked.

Don't kid yourself. In most instances, you're not a decision maker unless you are *the* decision maker—and chances are, you're scared of whoever this truly is. In fact, according to a research poll conducted by workplace expert and *BusinessWeek* columnist Lynn Taylor, the average U.S. employee spends more than 19 hours each week worrying about what their boss will do or say. That hardly seems productive to the corporate bottom line.

Unlike entrepreneurs who succeed or fail based on their own decisions, employees with “real” jobs must play the roles of obedient cogs in the machine tasked with performing X function Y amount of times to get Z result for the sole benefit of the mother ship. Deviation from the carefully designed corporate agenda dictated from above could result in unforeseen losses—and consequently, the termination of employment. After all, such actions prohibit you from improving the wealth of others and that cannot be tolerated. Mind you, even if you abide by the corporate agenda and there are losses, it still doesn't mean you're guaranteed any sort of safety—or severance. Say good-bye to freedom and hello to a life as a corporate wage slave.

Real jobs overwork and underpay you. A recent study conducted by the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health found that the average U.S. employee works two months longer than an employee from 1969 for nearly the same salary after inflation adjustments.

So, not only are many people overworked—they're also paid less for working more.

What does this mean to you in dollars and cents? Maybe \$35,100 annually; the average salary for 25- to 34-year-olds in the United States according to the July 2010 *BusinessWeek*

article “Retirement: Gen Y’s Empty Piggy Bank”—a dollar amount that has come to be after falling 19 percent over the last 30 years after adjusting for inflation. For many entry-level employees, the workday doesn’t end at 5 PM—and it often includes portions of weekends. So, we’ll suppose that between putting out your boss’s fires at 10 PM on Fridays and composing reports during football game viewing on Sundays, that your actual workweek is 50 hours long. Breaking down your annual salary, your actual wage is a little more than \$13.50 per hour. Now let’s include overtime. Oops—I forgot; according to the Department of Labor’s overtime rules, you might not even be eligible for overtime! Silly me. And let’s not forget about deductions to your paycheck for taxes and social security. So we’ll make that more like \$10 per hour. After you subtract for your clothing, travel expenses, college debts, and any costs associated with your company benefits package, well, you’re lucky if you can afford a night out at the movies.

On the bright side, you do get paid vacation days. Unfortunately, the average U.S. employee only gets around 13 vacation days—well below that of his counterparts in most other industrialized nations (Italy’s average is 42, France’s is 37, and Canada’s is 26). And according to the May 2009 CNN.com article, “Layoff Worries Keep Many from Taking Vacations,” 34 percent of Americans don’t even use all of their vacation time because they’re too afraid of losing their jobs. And although you might be eligible for a raise in a year or so, that’s only likely to happen if the corporate bigwigs haven’t taken all the profits to buy new vacation homes.

Job-happy stalwarts may claim that being an entrepreneur doesn’t guarantee you’ll make more money than a salaried employee or work less hours—and they’d be right. However, unlike “real” job employees—who are stuck in predetermined pay grades and boss-dictated work schedules—entrepreneurs benefit directly from every minute they spend on their business

and have the ability to earn as much money as their efforts can produce. As companies continue to streamline their processes—and globalization continues sending jobs overseas to cheaper labor markets—employees will find it increasingly more difficult to land a job that's willing to tolerate a more lenient work-life balance or pay them what they truly deserve for a full "40-hour" workweek.

Real jobs don't reward you for excellence. Not only are your wages pathetic—they are also a minuscule fraction of the marked-up prices that your company is charging its clients. Customers may be paying 10 times more than what you're earning, but other than the possibility of a small bonus, do you know what your upside is? Bupkes. Nothing. Zero. Zilch. Zip. Well, except—maybe—a health benefits package (although, according to a Pew Research Study, Gen Y is the least likely generation to receive health benefits, with nearly 40 percent uncovered by any sort of health plan whatsoever). No, the majority of the revenue that you generate goes toward overhead costs and lining the pockets of the senior executives. Did you have any idea that you were such a thoughtful and generous employee?!

In the end, your workweek translates into nothing more than a paycheck and the honor of begging your incorrigible, take-all-of-the-credit boss for an insignificant promotion that may or may not include a measly raise. Sure, you might get an increase in wages or a bonus; however, it's a mere fraction of the upside you've produced. Equity? Partner status? Ha! In most companies, those are simply hilarious jokes to tell your fellow disgruntled employees around the water cooler. Your company expects you to give everything you have—and more—without offering you real incentives for the harder work. And even if a company does offer some sort of stock option, accepting it merely renders you that much more dependent on the *only* hand that feeds you, by putting even

more of your eggs into a single basket that you're neither holding, nor have a real say in. I'm glad that you trust your CEO with your financial future. I wonder if he feels the same way about you?

Real jobs slowly kill your entrepreneurial ambitions. Real jobs have one mission: to ensure that you keep creating value for employers under the guise of safety, security, and career advancement. Little by little, inch by inch, "real" jobs suck the humanity from you, enticing you to put self-sufficiency on the backburner by luring you deeper into their pockets with promises of bonuses, extra vacation days, and cute-sounding perks like "casual Fridays." Distractions and tasks start to get the better of you and complacency takes over. Before you realize it, you've begun meeting fewer people; your drive dissipates; your ambitions dwindle; and your passions take a back seat to "getting things done." Suddenly, you've been transformed into a hollow shell of yourself, tricked into putting your plans on hold indefinitely—willing to deal with your misery in exchange for the comfort of a paycheck. You're stuck because now you feel like you really can't lose your "real" job. You're doomed because you don't know how to make it on your own or you have nothing to fall back on.

THE BROKEN PROMISE

Face it: The "work hard, get good grades, and go to college to get a good job" philosophy is obsolete and completely irrelevant to our generation. Times have changed. Our mentors wanted us to apply their lessons to the world as they experienced it. They simply assumed that their way of life would continue; they didn't get the memo that they were disconnected, out of touch, and living in a new world where a one-person business armed with an e-mail address and a mobile phone can rival captains of industry. (Actually, it was probably

e-mailed to them, and they forgot to call us to ask how to open the attachment.)

Today's job market is virtually nonexistent because of explosive population growth, the overexpansion of educational institutions, and the effects of globalization. There were only a few million students enrolled in U.S. institutions when our parents went to college. There are more than 19 million today—not to mention millions more taking classes part-time or online. Similarly, our parents weren't competing for jobs in a global marketplace when they graduated. Like our grandparents, they mostly worked jobs within their local communities—in a time before the Internet—when local consumption was high and the country still produced its own products. Today, many of us don't graduate from college to seek out local employment; instead, we compete globally for jobs as assistants to assistants who recycle data and produce nothing of real, tangible value.

Bottom line: We were promised more, and expected more as a result. By the time we discovered our dream jobs were imaginary, it was too late. We ended up being forced into an assembly line system known as the “real” job.

There were countless people you encountered along the way who could have explained the ways of the real world to you. But instead, everyone consciously decided to shield you from its harsh realities and fill your head with innumerable motivational sound bites. Your mother told you to “Work hard and you'll go far.” Your high school valedictorian inspired you to “Pursue your dreams.” MTV proclaimed, “You can do whatever you set your mind to.”

But do any of these catch phrases sound remotely applicable to the 9-to-5 lifestyle as we've come to know and experience it today? How many employed recent college grads do you know are “living the dream”? Most aren't even working in their fields of study—if they have jobs at all. I'm sure the individual

with the \$100,000 degree in public relations is thrilled about his position as the resident coffee and copy grunt for an insurance broker.

No one ever said, “Work hard so that you get better placement in the system.” Why? Because no one actually wanted you to become a corporate slave; they wanted you to fulfill their delusional expectations. And when their concepts of your dream job didn’t materialize out of nowhere, you were told that you needed to get a “real” job. Now you’re expected to forget everything you’ve ever known because you need to pay the bills. But when we can’t even get “real” jobs—or the ones we’re accepting aren’t even in our field—what does that say about the credibility of “the system”?

Contrary to what you may have been told, avoiding climbing the corporate ladder does *not* mean you are doomed to fail in life. *You* define your success in this world—not your parents, mentors, or teachers. They have—or eventually will—let their fears for your security, livelihood, and well-being overshadow the core values they instilled in you. Their values are still right; but their applications of those ideals are outdated, flawed, and no longer apply to your reality.

If you’re one of the tens of millions of young people who can’t even get their footing on the corporate ladder—let alone climb it—then now isn’t the time to actively keep putting your future in someone else’s hands by continuing to mail out resumes. Such an action is the equivalent of inserting a quarter into a broken arcade game, losing it to the machine, and popping another quarter in, hoping for a different outcome.

This is not a job market—it is an *opportunity* market.

Stop trying to fight your way into the system—and fight your way around it instead. If you’re wasting away at a 9-to-5 job, stop hurting yourself and your future. Paychecks come and go; but wasted time is gone forever. Rather than

wasting time, money, and resources on sending out resumes or working dead-end “real” jobs to make ends meet, it’s time to refocus your energies on attaining and securing your financial independence.

Never let those around you dismiss your passions and ambitions as a symptom of postcollegiate stress disorder or shrug off your contempt for the system as the ramblings of a disgruntled employee. It’s never wrong to want more, so long as you keep both feet on the ground and a level head on your shoulders. With the proper training, attitude, and dedication, you have the power to build a revenue-generating business and rise above the antiquated social conditioning that is the 9-to-5 mentality.

However—if you think that just because mommy and daddy screwed you up that you’re entitled to be an entrepreneur—*boy*, have you got another thing coming.

