

Chapter 1

Is This Book for Me?

If you are thinking about whether you should get more education or where to get it, this book is for you.

But this book isn't your typical guide to schools. It's designed to help you better understand yourself and your current situation.

ASK THE RIGHT QUESTION

If you aren't currently considering more education, as you read you might learn that it's just what you need to make progress in your life. And if you're sure that more education is the right next step, you might surprise yourself and discover that it isn't.

Many books focus on the process of getting into school or how to rank different schools based on their features. This book doesn't tackle those questions.

Instead, if you are considering getting more education, this book will help you answer a more foundational question first. That question is *why*?

Why are you seeking more education in your life? Or why should you? What is the progress you are trying to make?

Once you know the answer, you will be ready to make a better choice – and making a good choice is more critical today than ever before, as the cost of college has risen and a mistake can be crippling, but the rewards can be life changing. In today's complex world of choosing college, you need every possible edge you can get.

If you're willing to put in just a little time and be honest with yourself, this book can give you that edge.

We've learned that there are many reasons people go back to school. And there are more people in situations just like yours than you could have ever imagined who are struggling just like you.

YOU COULD BE STRUGGLING BECAUSE ...

You are in high school and stressed out over the college admissions process.

You know exactly which college you want to attend, but understand that college admissions can be like a lottery and you aren't sure whether to apply to "safety" schools.

You feel that your parents, friends, family, school, or employer are pushing you to go to a school that doesn't excite you.

You feel like you're just going through the motions as you apply and that education is the next logical step in your life.

You're unsure whether college – or any education at all – is the right next step.

You feel stuck – at home, in your town, in your job, or in a relationship – and that going to school would provide a good escape.

You are in a rut at work, know what you want next, and understand that you need more education to get there.

You are in a rut at work, don't know what you want next, and think education could help you figure it out.

You're ready to take the next step in your career and know what education you need to get there.

You are late in your career and wish you had pursued a dream earlier through more education.

You are at a comfortable place in your life and ready to learn more.

You have been out of the workforce, want to get back in, and think going back to school could help.

In all of these situations and many others, you have a struggle. You're trying to figure out what's next. And we can help you.

WHY THIS BOOK CAN HELP

This book can help by giving you the language to understand the outcome you are seeking in your situation. It will also give those around you, like your parents, the language to understand what you are going through so they communicate on your terms, not theirs.

How? Because we interviewed and interrogated people to collect more than 200 detailed stories of individuals making choices just like yours. And then we surveyed well

over a 1000 more students to learn about their choosing process, too.

We didn't collect stories from just anybody. We collected them from people resembling nearly everybody.

We talked to people who chose four-year schools, two-year schools, coding bootcamps, online schools, and more. We interviewed women and men of all races. We talked to students who were under 18 all the way up to students who were over 60. Some of the students we talked to already had a college or even a master's or PhD degree. Others had only a high school diploma or a General Educational Diploma (GED). Some were the first in their family to go to college. We talked to both students who attended school full-time, as well as those who worked while they attended. The students we talked to came from wealthy, middle-class, and low-income families.

The one thing they had in common? They were choosing whether and where to get more education.

We didn't just collect their stories. Once we had them, we analyzed them to learn *why* people were choosing school. We discovered what was driving each person to seek more education and what success in each situation looked like – what we call a “Job to Be Done.”

We discovered that there are *five* “Jobs to Be Done” for which people choose college. That's right. After collecting over 200 stories and surveying well over a thousand students, we found just five *Jobs*.

People choose school to:

1. Get into “their best” school
2. Do what's expected of them
3. Get away
4. Step it up
5. Extend themselves

Sounds simple, right? Well, it is ... and isn't.

Each "Job" is filled with lots of underlying forces and reasons that shape people's decisions.

Some of these reasons are functional considerations. For example, if I get another degree, I'll get a raise that justifies the cost.

But we're not robots. We typically don't do things just for functional reasons. More often than not, the forces acting on us are emotional or social. For example, all of my friends are going to college, so maybe I should, too. Or, I really want to challenge myself to see if I can do this.

After all, the choice to get more education – or where to get that education – is complicated.

There are many forces tugging on us in all directions. We are pushed and pulled by our dreams and aspirations, by what people in our lives tell us and do, by society's expectations, and by basic needs. From a young age, some just assume they will go to college after high school. Others don't think of college until much later. For many of us, our decisions are anchored early on by sports allegiances, family ties and stories, formative educational experiences, geographic considerations, financial matters, and more.¹

But you already know that, or you wouldn't be reading this book.

That's why we call your motivations for going to college "Jobs" rather than just "reasons" or some other name. A "Job" captures the *set* of reasons that *cause* you to do something, along with your circumstances and a clear understanding of what success looks like in that context. *In the book, we capitalize the word "Job" whenever we are referring to a "Job to Be Done" to avoid confusion from*

the everyday usage of the word “job” – a paid position of employment – which many suggest is the primary reason people go to college today (spoiler alert: it’s more complicated than that).

Bob Moesta, one of this book’s coauthors, created the Jobs to Be Done theory. It is more than just theoretical. Understanding human behavior – what people actually do, not just what they say they will do – can help people make better choices.

Bob developed his theory more than two decades ago with Harvard Business School Professor Clayton Christensen, and he’s used it to build over 3500 new services, products, and businesses across nearly every industry – not only for education, but also for cars, consumer packaged goods, food, defense, software, financial services, and health care. The services and products that Bob and his team at the ReWired Group have helped develop account for billions of dollars of sales per year. The central insight behind the theory is that people don’t buy products or services for their own sake. Instead, they “hire” products and services to help them do a Job – which is to say, make progress in a specific circumstance in their life.

Pairing Bob with Michael Horn, the other author of this book, who for over a decade has been researching, writing about, and shaping the future of education, as well as helping students and schools innovate, allowed us to uncover insights to help *you*.

HELPING YOU AS A STUDENT

And that’s where we start. In the next chapter, we tell you why now, more than ever before, getting the college-choosing process right is so important.

Part II of the book is then focused on helping you make a good decision given your situation. In Chapters 3–7, we explore each Job to help you discover which one describes your current context. To help you identify which Job you’re in right now, we share several of the stories from the people we talked to so that the Jobs are clear and concrete. **We also built a tool that will help diagnose which of these Jobs you are experiencing right now. It’s free with the purchase of this book. You can download it at <http://choosing.college>.**

For each Job we then offer advice for how to be successful. But more importantly, we offer guardrails to help you avoid a misstep.

Our advice is based on what we learned from the specific examples and patterns that emerged from the people we interviewed, as well as external research, our experience in designing new services to help people accomplish their Jobs, and our own personal experiences. Given that this is the first time we are publishing this research, we are sure that our advice is not comprehensive. Once you know what circumstance applies to you, you should talk with your friends and family.

To help you do so, the advice is structured in three steps in each chapter so you can walk through a design process and build a Job to Be Done profile for yourself:

Step 1: Know thyself. In this step, you clarify your current situation and what’s important to you right now from a functional, emotional, and social perspective.

Step 2: Identify matches. Here, you identify what educational options you can potentially hire to help you accomplish your Job based on the experiences you must have to help you make progress.

Step 3: Check and choose. In this step, you try out different solutions to learn precisely where you need to make progress – and importantly, what won’t work – and then you make your choice.

The goal is to help you make a better decision and get more value out of any education you pursue after high school – ranging from college to a short online course, or law school to a coding bootcamp.

Then we put it all together in Chapter 8 so you can see how, over the course of your life, you’re likely to experience most, if not all, of these Jobs – some of them several times – and what that means for you.

This book won’t give you “the answer” – as if there is only one – of where to go to school. We won’t break down the minutiae of every aspect of college, from cost to scholarships and from accessibility of faculty and teaching assistants to college safety. Other books, guides, and tools can help with that – but only once you know why you are going and what you’re really chasing.

Part II will help you figure that out, along with Chapter 11 in Part IV at the end of the book that summarizes three key insights for you.

HELPING YOU AS A PARENT

If you’re a parent, Part II is also for you. Perhaps the only thing more nerve-racking than figuring out what is next in your own life is wondering what is next for your child.

This book will help you with both. And even it will give you the language to be able to talk to your child in *their* language so that you can better understand each other and not talk past one another. If you have already completed

college, you will continue to learn throughout your life, so *each of the Jobs will have direct relevance for you*. That's right – as you read, you're likely to realize that this book will help you in your own life journey, not just your child's.

But at the end of each of the chapters in which we explore a Job we discovered (Chapters 3–7), we offer you concrete advice as a parent. The advice is aimed so you can help your child make progress given her goals – not yours – and so you don't set her back.

The insights and recommendations in these sections will also help guidance counselors, college counselors, and high school educators, as well as friends and colleagues of people struggling with the question of whether and where to pursue more education. Although we don't dive into the question of how high schools should redesign themselves based on what we've learned in this book, there is no question that there are many redesign opportunities to better prepare students for the journey of learning throughout their lives.²

HELPING YOU AS A SCHOOL PROFESSIONAL

This book isn't just for helping prospective students and parents. Helping students make better choices will force schools to improve. But we also want to help schools improve directly so they can innovate and offer better choices to students.

If you work at a college or university, lead or work at another type of educational program, or plan on starting one, Part II will help you understand why students consider and enroll in your school. That's the demand side of the equation.

Part III focuses on the supply side. It shows you how to design your school to help students be successful in their educational journeys. If you're a student or parent, reading Part III will help you know what to look for to see if schools are acting with your Job in mind. Not including this section would be doing an injustice because we'd be shortchanging one half of the equation that can improve the education choices you have available. But if you're a student or parent, Part III is *not* required reading.

If you work at an education provider, we dive deeper into the Jobs to Be Done theory in Chapter 9 so you can see why understanding the Job to Be Done affects both how you design your service and structure your organization to maximize the odds of success and efficiency. We also offer guardrails to help you avoid offering a one-size-fits-none solution.

In Chapter 10, we provide some insights into how to design better experiences for each of the different Jobs. We do not have all the answers, but in some cases, we recommend some radical restructuring to help students accomplish their goals given the circumstances in which they find themselves hiring education.

In Part IV, Chapter 11 summarizes and expands on some of the big insights that emerged in the course of the book. We also offer an Appendix that explains our research process – how you discover a Job to Be Done, how we found people to interview, and whom we interviewed. You only have to read the Appendix if you are interested in doing Jobs to Be Done research yourself or want to better understand our methodology.

So let's get started. A world of better decisions about your educational choices awaits you.