

AFTER-SCHOOL SPECIAL

By Tricia Stephenson, *The Rocky Mountain Collegian*, Colorado State U.

Life after college doesn't have to mean suit, tie and ulcer

Just because we're working toward a degree doesn't mean we're ready to settle into cozy careers and let the dust start gathering on our pension plans. At least, not yet. Rather than look for the security of mortgage payments, many of us take a month-to-month lease on life — and the job market.

We sniveling little 20somethings will tell you we're living by a "life's too short" axiom. Others say there's little choice for this generation.

"During a tight job market, more people opt for grad school or alternate routes, like temp jobs, internships and jobs they're overqualified for," says Sue Marshall, director of career planning and placement services at the U. of Oklahoma.

Steve Byrne, editor of "next," a GenX lifestyle page that appears in the Fort Wayne, Ind., *Journal Gazette*, also suspects that the economy is forcing a nontraditional approach to the job market.

"Are people doing it because they don't want to get caught up in the treadmill, or because they simply can't get on the treadmill?" he asks.

Whatever the reason, many of us are finding that alternative is the way to go.

We'll make our own jobs, thank you very much

Horrified by the thought of working on a set schedule? Maybe it's the idea of making money for someone else. If so, you may want to join the growing number of graduates in the ranks of the self-employed.

According to Linda Harris at the Center for Entrepreneurship at Wichita State U., new businesses, from lawn care to bed and breakfasts, are springing up from the minds of college students and graduates everywhere.

"The last two jobs I had were more supervised than I liked," says Mark Head, a '92 Wichita State graduate. "They gave me the impetus to go out and try it on my own."

About four months after graduation, Head started a marketing business, Image Impact Inc. He creates corporate identity packages using his copywriting and graphic design expertise. "It's going well, but growth is a little slow," Head says.

Karla Gordon, another '92 Wichita State grad, started her business right after graduation.

Willing to take a risk and learn how to run a business as she went along, Gordon started Spirit Spot, a collegiate and Greek store, with the help of investors — including Mom and Dad — and a small bank loan.

"I basically did this to get experience," Gordon says. "I didn't know what I wanted to do, and [as a business owner] you have to do it all."

For Gordon, business ownership is just a stepping stone. She's also working on her MBA, and you can bet she's loaded with a lot more experience than most of her classmates. Once she sells her business and completes her graduate work, she plans to jump into the traditional job market.

Gordon and Head both say starting your own business takes a lot of foresight. Gordon suggests using professors as resources to help with business planning.

"[Business ownership] isn't the perfect answer. But you run up against that in any job," Head says. "If you really love what you do, [that's] enough to cover the downsides."

Slacking

"I don't want to be normal," says Julie Brown, a '92 Colorado State U. graduate. "When I look at what everyone else is doing, I think they have boring lives."

After graduation, Brown opted for the cash-and-coast method of living rather than rushing into a career. She has waited tables at several restaurants and lived in a

VW bus to save money for backpacking trips.

"It's easy to get a house and pay rent and bills," Brown says about the traditional approach to adulthood. "It's daring to travel."

Brown's experiences backpacking around the Southwest for three months in '94 gave her an appreciation for a vagabond lifestyle. "I do want to get a real job, but I also want to take a month off next summer for backpacking," Brown says. "Am I going to be able to do that with a real job? I mean, isn't it real enough to wait tables?"

Brown represents a cross-section of our generation. There's a current rippling through many of us that's pulling us out of the mainstream. We're not just drifting; we're making a conscious choice to enjoy ourselves.

"We could sit there and spend our whole lives thinking of the future and what we're going to do and save our money for," Brown says. "But I want to be able to say, 'Yeah, my life was rich; it was dynamic.'"

Internships — the official way to earn less

Maybe you're looking for a short-term commitment. Most likely you're looking for some viable experience and a chance to prove yourself as an employee. Internships may be the answer.

Melissa Bornhoft, employee relations coordinator at Colorado State U., says more companies nationwide are accepting interns. She says companies hire interns to check them out and see if they've made a good match before they offer a full-time position. Sound like *Love Connection*?

"We've had people tell us that they've applied for 25 to 30 [intern] positions before getting one," Bornhoft says. And if the employer's not smitten, get ready to look for another job in a year or less.

It took Justin Levy, a '93 graduate of California's U. of the Pacific, eight months of unpaid bliss to get a commitment from a Denver concert and promotions company. And it's still only part-time.

"You have to show people what you can do," Levy says. "I don't think internships are just a plus anymore. They're a necessity."

Levy believes that when you get out of college, you have to find a part-time job that pays the bills *and* do an internship. "It will eventually develop into something."

Searching for the life of meaning

Some graduates still feel that there's something *out there*, beyond the walls of a classroom or office. But they no longer want to leech off of their parents and the American Way.

World Teach, a project run out of Harvard U., gives recent graduates the opportunity to travel *and* give something back. It places 340 to 350 volunteers a year in English-speaking schools in 11 countries.

"I knew I wanted to travel, but I wanted to travel in a way I could get to know the culture," says Amanda Hughen, a '91 graduate of Virginia's Washington & Lee U., about teaching in Costa Rica.

By not immediately locking herself into a job or grad school, Hughen was able to explore her options. Now she is in San Francisco, doing volunteer education and outreach coordination for an urban national park.

"If I'd stayed in the U.S., I would have turned to something that's not right for me."

Patrick McCabe, the program's director of admissions, says the programs, most of which are a two-year commitment, are an exercise in survival.

"People who come back from World Teach find that the sky's the limit."

Title doesn't matter

We're called late bloomers, slackers even. But it's time to recognize that our alternative route to post-grad, adult life is working for us. Whether we're creating our own businesses or volunteering time for others, we're less worried about saving for our retirement than about living life right the first time.



Chad Harder, *The Minnesota Daily*, U. of Minnesota

Job options after graduation can make you flush with pride.