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GUEST OPINION Grads: Do things you don't like

By Steve Winzenburg

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Do what you love. Have passion for your profession. Find a job that fulfills your purpose in life. Enjoy the journey more than the destination.

Recent college graduation speakers have delivered inspirational advice such as this to those struggling to enter the work force. But there is one maxim I rarely hear articulated to job seekers: Do things you don't like.

Most new grads leave campus expecting to have "fun" at a job they "love." But in the real world, new hires often are expected to work long hours, take on menial tasks, come in on days off and spend a lot of time doing things they don't get emotionally excited about.

Oprah Winfrey said that for years she worked a job she didn't like, as a local TV news anchorwoman, because she knew it could lead to her goal of being an actress and talk show host.

One graduate from Eastern Iowa couldn't find a full-time job but volunteered to sweep floors in order to get her foot in the door at a business with no openings. She knew that doing a menial after-hours task would prove her seriousness in wanting a paid position. The bosses let her sweep, and within months they hired her as a replacement for a staffer who quit abruptly. Within two years, she was put in charge of a major part of the business, promoted over people who had worked there much longer.

In the career preparation class I teach, I encourage graduating seniors to expose themselves to things they are not interested in. I tell the macho guys to pick up a women's magazine they wouldn't normally read. Rock music junkies are told to turn on National Public Radio.

One young woman took me so seriously that while perusing the magazines in the dentist's waiting room, she picked up Sports Illustrated for the first time. She said it came in handy the next week when she interviewed in an office filled with men - and she got the job.

When my daughter turned 13, I gave her a gift subscription - to Time magazine. Not something every girl wishes for on her birthday. Soon I would catch her flipping through it, just to look at the pictures or a political cartoon or the entertainment news. For eight years we kept that subscription going.

At age 16, she took a radio board operator job at a news and talk station and surprised the hosts by being able to converse on the air about current events.

At age 21, she's the assistant program director at a news and talk radio station, where she blogs about the day's news.

Our daughter never read through an entire issue of Time magazine. But I'm convinced that exposing her to something she didn't necessarily like helped contribute to a career she now loves. It's all about doing things that aren't necessarily "fun" in order to expand future workplace potential.

Look what it did for Oprah.

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