

Hi everyone!

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

This month I'm hitting a big parenting milestone. My first child graduating from college and embarking on "real life." It brings up a lot of emotions and memories for me, going through the same rite of passage many years ago myself. My first job search. My big move from Arizona to New York City. My tiny Upper West Side apartment. But I'll get to all that in a second.

First, I'd like to say something to the graduates in the class of 2021.

I don't need to tell you what a unique group of graduates you are.

The unprecedented circumstances of the last year have re-written the rules of what many of us faced after college. Without a doubt.

Graduation – in any year – is an emotionally complicated time, with so many unknowns and so many possibilities. It probably seems to you like the future is more intangible and unpredictable than ever.

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My advice?
Stay curious. Ask questions.
And show up.

But here's one thing I know about times of uncertainty: the best opportunities for change happen in moments like this. Smart companies and savvy entrepreneurs are making plans right now, investing in what comes next, anticipating the upturn that always follows a time of upheaval.

My advice? Stay curious. Ask questions. And show up.



Let me take you back a few decades – back to when I was graduating from college in the midst of a prolonged recession.

Many of my classmates were taking any job they could. They just wanted to get a foot in the door somewhere, anywhere. And many were even opting for unpaid internships.

Well I couldn't afford to do that. Even if that meant being a bit more creative and scrappy to find that first full-time job. The problem was, I didn't know enough about the job market to chart my own path. So, I did what I would do over and over again in my life to make an informed decision: I asked questions. Of anybody and everybody.

If the opportunities I want are not coming to me, I'll have to create them for myself.

I went out in search of people to network with who could help me find those interviews. I was looking for an "in" or an advantage anywhere I could find it. So I started looking close to home – the Tee Pee restaurant, where I had been waitressing throughout college. It was a natural place to network because of the constant stream of people coming from all over the country to enjoy delicious Mexican food.

I started with a customer who had been a regular over the years. We always chatted as I was getting him his dinner order, but I never asked him what he did. I decided it was time to find out after he asked me what I was planning on doing after graduation -- that dreaded question.

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"What do you do for a living?" I asked.

He told me he lived in Los Angeles and came to Phoenix regularly for work. He managed product placement for Anheuser-Busch on movie sets.

Now, being a college student, I knew what Anheuser-Busch was. But what was product placement exactly?

"Where do you place beer products?"

"On movie sets. We film a lot of movies in Arizona."

"I could definitely do that! Can you get me an interview?" I said, half kiddingly – but not really.

Sure enough he came through. One interview in the books! I just had to get to Los Angeles which was easy enough.

I was feeling pretty confident. What was once something I didn't know how to tackle, getting the interview, actually was fairly easy to line up. One step at a time. So, I continued to scan my network, inside and outside of the little restaurant. If I was going to be in Los Angeles for an interview, maybe I should line up some other interviews. And visit other cities too.

Another frequent pair of customers was a couple from Illinois who owned a vacuum cleaner business. They invited me to interview with their company – which would ultimately mean a move to Chicago. Chicago could be a fun option!

"What kind of roles are in your vacuum cleaner company?"

"Marketing could be a great start for you."

The idea of marketing piqued my interest for sure. And it also solidified the fact that I knew I wanted to move to a big city – Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Boston, or New York – to start my career. I didn't exactly see myself marketing vacuum cleaners, but I didn't want to rule anything out. Things were falling into place, and I started mapping my path forward.

Decide on a direction. Set your course. But be open to changing it if necessary.

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I put together a list of every company I could imagine working at, as well as every place someone could connect me for an interview. I said yes to all. I assembled all of my leads and I started sending out letters and making phone calls, this was before email was a thing believe it or not. I told everyone who responded to my inquiries that I would fly myself out for a meeting. That I had researched their company extensively (and I did). I pitched myself hard. I knew I was not only a hard worker, but that I was sure I could contribute and make a difference.

Before long, I had *seventy* potential interviews lined up – in all of my wish-list cities! They were entry-level positions at a variety of companies, from consultancies to financial service providers to publishing.

But I didn't stop there. As I embarked on my "tour," when people asked about my plans (and they always did), I told them which city I was headed to next.

"My third stop is Chicago. I've never been there so I am very excited."

"What are you doing there?"

"More interviewing. I am on a tour getting in as many interviews as possible over the next month. If you know anyone that is looking for a smart, hard-working college grad, I am the person."

Just by putting myself out there, telling people what I was looking for – most were eager to help. I was amazed at how many people started opening up their rolodexes.


"I do know someone in Chicago. Let me give her a call and see if her company has any entry-level positions open."

I soon lost count of how many interviews I had done over the course of that month, but it was close to 100 in total.

Still, there was one place I wanted to work at above all the rest. It was a New York publishing company whose product I really admired.

Fortune magazine.





Unlike many of the other companies I sent letters to, I didn't have a referral contact at *Fortune*, but I didn't let that stop me. I looked at the masthead and went straight to the top. Marshall Loeb. Managing Editor of *Fortune* Magazine. A major figure in the New York and national publishing scene.

I figured it couldn't hurt to ask for an interview -- what's the worst that could happen?

In fact, I've found that the most certain way to get what you want is to ask, directly and explicitly. And ask yourself that question too if it seems a bit scary. The worst that could happen is rarely that bad.

In all the letters I had sent to prospective employers, I simply asked for an interview and a job, but I added a more personal touch to my *Fortune* letter, sharing how his magazine had helped me understand finance, my minor in college. I explained how *Fortune* really helped to demystify many of the challenges I'd initially had with the subject in my classes.

Then, I got a letter back! Marshall had responded thanking me for writing and proposing that if I was ever in New York, I should get in touch. He would be excited to meet me.

Wow.


That added New York City to my list of places to visit. The last stop on my US "find a job" tour.

Btw, you may be wondering how much this "investment" cost me. Great story there as well. When I thought about taking this month-long adventure to figure out what I wanted to do, I worried I may not be able to afford all the stops. I called a travel agent and ran through my five-city itinerary with her: Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Boston, and New York. \$472 total. That's right. Total. Still a lot for me, but much less than I expected. And looking back, one of the best investments I made in myself.

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Fast-forward to a cold January day in New York, 1989, as I walked along Sixth Avenue to the famous Time & Life Building. I pushed through the revolving door into an overwhelmingly awesome lobby of glass, marble, and stainless steel, hung with enormous works of art.

I hesitated. Could I really go through with this? That little doubting voice was chiming in in my head. And the fear was rolling in. I hadn't actually arranged an interview at *Fortune*, but I did have my letter from Marshall Loeb in hand. Suddenly, it felt like an impossible long shot. I took a deep breath.

Show up. What's the worst that can happen? You've got this.

I got in the elevator, rode up several floors to the Human Resources department, and went directly up to the receptionist.

"Hello. I'm interested in a job at Fortune. I am here to see Marshall Loeb."

She looked at me skeptically.

"Do you have an appointment?"

"No. But I have a letter from him though."

A woman standing nearby had heard our exchange. She came over and introduced herself as the Head of Human Resources. She glanced at the letter. Maybe she had seen a few like it?

"What Mr. Loeb meant was that you should get in touch and make an appointment for an interview if you were planning to be in New York."

Although she was saying "No," what I heard was "Maybe."

"Maybe there is another opportunity with one of the other magazines? I would love to work here. I am leaving tomorrow. Would it be possible to interview somewhere else for one of your openings?" I didn't turn to go. I just stood there. Right in front of her. Hard to ignore.

I had become an expert in asking for what I wanted. An interview.

There was a pause. Then she remembered something. "There really aren't any openings at Fortune right now, but there is one at *Time*. It's in the circulation department. For an executive assistant role. Would you be interested in that?"

Now she was saying "maybe," but I was hearing "yes." I had only a vague idea of what circulation was. It wasn't *Fortune* Magazine. It wasn't Marshall Loeb. But if I could work in the building, in New York City, maybe I could meet the Fortune people and eventually get hired as a writer.

Have a goal but also be open for adjustments.

"Yes! I would be interested in interviewing!"



I am forever grateful to that kind woman from Human Resources.

She escorted me to an office on a different floor. There she introduced me to Brooke McMurray, who was looking for an executive assistant. In my interview, I told Brooke my whole story—about how much I liked writing and reading *Fortune*, my letter to Marshall Loeb, my seventy interviews on my cross country tour. My authentic story.

Brooke listened patiently. I can only imagine how I came across.

When I returned to Arizona, I had a voicemail waiting. Many voicemails. And letters. Offers! Including one from the last place I interviewed. Brooke wanted to hire me as her assistant! I had landed a job in the city that was my top choice and in the building I wanted to be in. Not *Fortune*, but close enough. And working for a person who I believed could support me as I supported her.

Turns out, I picked right. One of the best bosses I ever had.



I've seen a few challenging moments since my own graduation in 1989, and when you are in the moment, they certainly feel like unmatched havoc and uncertainty. And perhaps, 2020 may feel a bit like this for some of you.

But don't let the events of this past year keep you from moving forward. Tomorrow is a new day. Your job now is to be open to possibilities. Be inquisitive. Ask anyone and everyone for advice, for leads, for connections. Be a sponge. Absorb as much knowledge as you can to help set you in the right direction.

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Create the opportunities you want.
Don't wait for them to
present themselves either.

Create the opportunities you want. Don't wait for them to present themselves either. Take the risk. Write that email, send that DM, or make that cold call to pursue that possibility.

Find what you are looking for. It's out there.

And know that I believe, and so do many others, that YOU can make a difference. And you can find what you are looking for. It's your turn now to get out there and live undaunted!

#takethenextstep #collegecanwait #education #graduation

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Kara

Kara

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