

# Job futurist reassures young workers: No career plan? No worries

By Catherine Clifford | October 19, 2016



Source: emilyberlphoto  
Jody Greenstone Miller

There is so much pressure to know what you want to do with your life, especially among young people when they are first transitioning into the workforce.

Uncertainty is scary. And from the outside, it often looks like successful professionals must have had a secret treasure map that they followed, step-by-step, to get to that corner office.

The truth is, they didn't, and you won't, either. Expecting to know ahead of time exactly where your career is going to go and how you will get there is unreasonable, says Jody Greenstone Miller, an independent consultant and the co-founder and CEO of Business Talent Group, an executive marketplace for project-based work.

Prior to launching Business Talent Group, Miller had 11 jobs and spanned seven careers. By the time she was 48, she had worked as a partner at the Seattle-based venture capital firm Maveron and in the White House as Special Assistant to President Bill Clinton.

Miller has earned a reputation as a work futurist and as such, she hears from scores of young people looking for advice. They don't know what they want to do with their lives and are turning to Miller to help them craft that elusive treasure map to the top.



Getty Images  
A scene of Twentieth Century Fox 'Office Space' with Jennifer Anniston

"I just think that's crazy," Miller said, in an interview with CNBC.

One young woman in particular was sent to Miller by her father. He hoped Miller would help his daughter figure out what she wanted to do with her life. Miller talked to the young woman and found out that she was very clear on her desire to go to business school but she wasn't sure what she would do after that.

Miller recounts her advice to the young woman. "You are going to business school. That's your next step. And you are going to get there, you are going to learn, you are going to expand your horizons, you are going to figure out what you want to do. And by the way, if you don't get into business school, you are going to be just fine anyway."

The young woman was surprised, and relieved, to hear that she didn't need to have her entire career planned out by the time she enrolled in business school.

"I do think the message to particularly young people has to be, 'You are not expected to know the answers and you are going to have to ride the wave and that is going to be the norm.' The more they hear that and see that in the world, the more they are going to have to relax," says Miller.

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Her own winding path through a multitude of jobs and careers serves as a counterpoint to the likes of Steven Spielberg, who, she points out, famously knew he wanted to make movies when he was 12. As it turns out, he knew what he was passionate about early on, followed that career path, was remarkably successful and has become an icon in the industry. But he is an outlier. That, Miller says, is not how it usually goes.

"A lot of people talk about 'Follow your passion, follow your passion.' I think that is a really hard standard for anybody to aspire to," says Miller.

Not only is it hard to pick one career trajectory to be passionate about, but with the pace of technology changing so rapidly, it's also impossible to know what options will be available to you at the end of your career. The jobs that are available today won't be the same jobs that will be in demand in five years, let alone in two decades.

Instead of expecting everyone to pick their one passion early and stick to it, Miller says young people need to learn to get comfortable with uncertainty and with the idea that their career will have many chapters, many of which can't even be envisioned yet.

"I was on this panel last week that was about career pivots and I started off by saying, 'I don't think 'career pivot' is the right way to think about it. This is what careers will look like. This is not some odd thing that is going to happen to some people. It's the way the world is moving and so we have to think about careers differently,'" says Miller. "We have to think about what normal is differently. Resumes will look very different. They will look a lot more like mine."

While that is reasonable advice to give when you are 58 years old with an impressive career under your belt, it can be hard to sit with that level of turmoil when you don't have a long resume and countless accomplishments. But a groundswell of acceptance for nontraditional career paths is growing, in part because the evolving job market is forcing the new reality, and in part because millennials are pushing for more flexibility and autonomy at work.

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"We are in this weird moment in the culture where people are starting to become aware of it but they are saying, 'Well, it's not going to be everybody, it's going to be the career pivoters, it's some new little odd thing that some people are going to have to do.'" Miller says that, soon enough, we will realize that this group of "career pivoters" is everybody.

In the meantime, Miller says young, anxious, newbie professionals need to take the time to stare down their own preconceived notions.

"They need to sit on the beach, they need to look at the ocean and they need to understand, 'That's where I am going,'" Miller says. "'This is what life is: I am going to have some ups, I am going to have some downs, I am going to get wiped out a couple times, get my mouth full of water, but I am going to get back up and that's the norm.'"