

Unemployed graduates guilty of 'job snobbery' are missing out on opportunities

Comment by Phil Smith, Director of Sport, Sport England.

Introducing the 'job snob' by Kelly Goodwin

Good news! The graduate job market is showing 'pockets' of regional and sector growth with an increase identified in starting salaries (ONS, 2012). This bodes well but at the same time there is a new type of graduate evolving increasingly labelled by the media as the 'Job Snob' (The Independent, 2013). This is a student who thinks that because they have a degree or a qualification that some jobs are beneath them or that they should not apply for work outside of what they consider to be their line of expertise. Young people who believe that they should work only if they are able to secure their dream job (Duncan Smith, 2013).

The NUS (2013) argue that it is reasonable for a graduate who has invested heavily both financially and personally to hold out for a job that is in line with their qualifications. Reasonable indeed, however, with the current economic climate as it is, the 'pockets' of growth identified in the sector are unlikely to be sufficient to provide sport-related employment for all. At a time when there are more students studying than there are graduate jobs, one in five is out of work with an average of 85 applications per role (AGR, 2013), graduates need to be even more strategic with their forward planning. It is a time to value 'all' work and to understand how it may contribute to experience and skill development.

Phil Smith, the Director of Sport for Sport England kindly agreed to be interviewed and provides comment on the challenges graduates face. Discussion surrounds the attitudes and behaviors that have helped bring about success and how graduates may still excel when jobs are scarce and the dream job ever scarcer.

Name: Phil Smith

Current role: Director of Sport - Sport England

Main Responsibilities: Managing Sport England's investment into National Governing Bodies of sport

Previous employment: General Secretary - Manchester County FA, Business Systems Analyst - The FA, Project Manager - The FA, Head of Policy and Public Affairs - The FA

Education: BSocSc Political Science and MSc Sport and Recreation Management.

My experiences before my professional career began have always stood me in good stead. Having completed a Masters I began consultancy work which in effect, was doing whatever anyone had available. I worked for academics on various projects, which helped me to gain genuine work experience as opposed to just qualifications.

What helped secure the job at the Manchester FA was a number of things including my work ethic and willingness to take work where available. I had a year before my Masters during which I worked in a sport shop and a clothes shop, both were hugely helpful and taught me about working with people. What you learn in a customer environment, working in shops, bars, restaurants stands you in good stead for any job. At interviews I would tell

them that I understand the customer, working with people from all backgrounds and helping with their demands. There are few jobs that won't require dealing with people, different personalities, wants, needs, moods. It was enormously helpful to have what you might call a 'proper job' then when I moved into more of the jobs I was after based on my education, the things I had picked up, I found really useful.

What I believe has helped me to succeed is that if I say I am going to do something I do it and to a good standard.

Being trustworthy, dependable and reliable helps build a reputation that you need to grow and cultivate to be successful. To be trusted to be given the briefest of instructions and left to crack on.

Emotional intelligence is also important, to be able to read people, to understand what they really want even if they are not able to articulate this themselves. A lot of my jobs have involved doing this and it has been pure practice along the way.

People who work in sport are more emotional, sport matters for people in a way that it is not just a job and when you work in the industry you have to be ready for high and low emotions. Topics up for discussion are often very personal and you need to be able to read how the people you are dealing with really feel about something, what's big, what's small, what's important, what's not and what is going to get them excited but this only comes with practice, there is no course for that.

One of the things anybody should think about is that you do your best learning when you get it wrong.

You realise how something has happened, you analyse it and don't do it again, that has been enormously helpful.

I think it definitely helps that the people who work for you know that you have done their kind of jobs.

When you have worked your way up, they cannot say that you do not understand what they are doing or how difficult it is or, what they are up against because you do. That is not to say you have to have fought your way up from the bottom to the top in order to be successful.

Sport graduates need to be aware that there are a growing number of highly successful individuals in sport that have come from other industries.

The number is increasing, people coming in from other industries and being successful in the sports industry because they are applying their professional skills gained in another sector to sport. You don't have to be a blue blood sports person from birth to be successful in the industry. Passion is not enough, everyone in sport has passion, it's ten a penny so what has to mark you out from the crowd is your ability to get a professional job done.

What do I look for when recruiting?

When employing others I do consider a varied background and a variety of experience to be important. The qualities I look for in the

people I recruit include the professional skills and/or qualifications to do the tasks necessary but equally personality and a background that shows willingness to work and not necessarily in perfect jobs. I look for gaps in CVs and I do ask about them.

When we are talking about young people fresh out of Higher Education I place great value on the people who have gone out and made it happen and not waited for a job to arrive at their door. If this means working behind a bar or as I did working in a shop then so be it. Many people coming out of Higher Education might think it's not the sort of career they want permanently; I think it shows they are willing to get stuck in.

I look for in the people I recruit, a personality that fits with a team approach, people that you can get on with, people that you can trust. It's like building a sport teams, a football team, you pick team players. You then get a lot of team player expertise and where applicants learn this expertise is from working in ordinary jobs in teams, this is where you learn how to deal with different people.

Final thought

It is a very challenging market place at the moment for graduates, they may have an idea of what is their dream job but the jobs are just not there or in the quantities required. Those leaving Higher Education need to try to put the odds, the statistics out of the mind, ultimately if there is only one of you, you only need one job, think about the type of work and life you want to have and have that as a long-term goal. There are many, many different ways to get there. Having a long-term goal and plotting the one step ahead is a smart thing to do and that first step for those coming out of Higher Education may well be out of the sport industry. You might not get the dream job the first time but you might get it eventually and you get it by taking the job that is not the dream job and doing it very well. ■

words:

Phil Smith

Phil is the Director of Sport at Sport England



compiled by:

Kelly Goodwin

Kelly is a Senior Lecturer at Bournemouth University



References:

AGR. (2013). Summer Survey: Graduate job market remains tough, but shows pockets of regional and sector growth. The Association of Graduate Recruiters press release, accessed [21 October 2013] <http://www.agr.org.uk/Press-Releases/agr-summer-survey-graduate-job-market-remains-tough-but-shows-pockets-of-regional-and-sector-growth>

Duncan Smith, I. (2013). It's better to be a shelf stacker than a 'job snob'. The Telegraph, accessed [21 October 2013] <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/9095050/ain-Duncan-Smith-its-better-to-be-a-shelf-stacker-than-a-job-snob.html>

NUS. (2013). Graduates miss out on employment because they are 'job snobs'. The Independent, accessed [21 October 2013] <http://www.independent.co.uk/student/news/graduates-miss-out-on-employment-because-they-are-job-snobs-8762345.html>

ONS. 2012. Graduates in the labour market, 2012. Office of National Statistics publication.

BASES Student Conference 2014

University of Portsmouth
8-9 April 2014

Sport and Exercise Science: Putting the Pieces Together

This conference offers you an exciting multi-disciplinary programme, with workshops on exercise physiology, biomechanics, psychology and environmental physiology in the University of Portsmouth's first-class sport and exercise science facilities.

- For current undergraduate and postgraduate students of sport, exercise or related disciplines.
- Great networking opportunities with other academic institutions and employers.
- Chance to present work and learn more about postgraduate study and career development in sport and exercise science.
- Keynote presentations from discipline experts.
- Excellent seaside location within walking distance of transport links, hotels, bars and restaurants.

W: www.port.ac.uk/sportscience/bases2014

E: bases2014@port.ac.uk

