

# Recession

# Proof



# Graduate

HOW TO LAND  
THE JOB YOU WANT  
BY DOING FREE WORK

# Charlie Hoehn

# PRAISE FOR RECESSION-PROOF GRADUATE

*“This guide is worth far more than any course you will take at school this year.”*

– **THE REMARKABLE STUDENT**

*“[Free work] may very well become today’s solution for anyone unable to get an internship or job in this economy.”* – **IDENTIFIED**

*“Bringing value to someone you want to work for is the BEST way to get noticed... Charlie Hoehn mastered this concept in ‘Recession Proof Graduate,’ and I would highly recommend you read it if this is a path you want to take.”* – **TUCKER MAX**, #1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF ‘I HOPE THEY SERVE BEER IN HELL’

*“I STRONGLY advocate Charlie Hoehn’s method.”* – **RYAN HOLIDAY**, DIRECTOR OF MARKETING FOR AMERICAN APPAREL, BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF ‘TRUST ME, I’M LYING’

*“One of the most popular and compelling e-books posted out there... A very entertaining read, he goes into the “truth” of what these graduates are going through, and then explains a very interesting approach to getting that job... not the job they will be hating for the rest of their lives, but the job they want to do.”* – **RUSSELL MIYAKI**

*“If this doesn’t convince you that the ‘job’ game has changed, then I don’t know what will. This 30 page e-book gives you more value than most 300 page books do.”* – **RYAN O’LAUGHLIN**

*“I read it within a half hour and have thought about it every day since... I interviewed with a photographer on Tuesday and we really hit it off. She hired me on the spot... I’m beyond excited for what the future may hold. I don’t know if this is what I’m going to do with the rest of my life, but I do know that this brings me one step closer. And, to think, I owe it all to an e-book!”* – **JENNIFER NOLAND**

*“Like the majority of my fellow graduating class out there blasting out resumes, I didn’t get a job right out of college like I thought I would. But after reading and applying this guy’s advice, I got two offers in June: a marketing manager position with a Fortune 500 company in Canada and to co-found an online marketing start up.”* – **RADZ KETCHUM**

*“A must read for recent grads looking for work, or anyone looking to start a side hustle.”*  
– **JENNY BLAKE**, AUTHOR OF ‘LIFE AFTER COLLEGE’

*“Recession-Proof Graduate is somewhat misnamed. Its advice strikes me as sound even if (a) you graduated college more than a year ago, (b) there’s no recession, or (c) you didn’t go to college at all. In fact, it’s probably even more effective if (c).”* – **COLIN MARSHALL**, PRODUCER OF ‘NOTEBOOK ON CITIES AND CULTURE’ PODCAST

*“Anyone who’s spinning their wheels searching for an entry-level job after graduating from college should read his entire e-book and take heed. Hoehn’s definitely on to something.”*  
– **EXAMINER**

# Recession-Proof Graduate

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How to Land The Job You Want  
by Doing Free Work

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CHARLIE HOEHN

## MY STORY

**From first grade to my senior year of college, my record remained virtually flawless.** My overall GPA had landed around 3.8. My SAT and ACT scores were high, I was on the honor roll, belonged to several clubs, etc. I was the cookie-cutter student that counselors tried to mold other students into.

And while I was truly sad that the most fun years of my life were coming to a halt, I wasn't too worried. Sure, the economy was bad, but I'd done exactly what everyone told me to do. I had a stellar academic record, great recommendation letters ready to be deployed, and a hungry attitude that employers would swoon over. I was ready for the working world.

Yet here I was, less than three months after graduation... I was lying on my bathroom floor, pulling my hair out in frustration, and on the verge of a breakdown.

I'd been turned away or completely ignored by every single company I'd applied to over the course of 12 weeks. I was even rejected by a company I'd done a three-month internship with.

Well, I take that back. Two companies were interested in me.

The first was a staging company, and their only job requirements were: be a chain smoker, and embrace herniated discs. The second company turned out to be a pyramid scheme. Thanks, CareerBuilder!

What the hell? I thought employers would be beating down my door just to get a chance to interview me. I felt like I deserved *at least* a \$40,000 per year starting salary wherever I was hired, especially after doing so well in school all these years. I'd done everything they (i.e. teachers, counselors, parents, society) told me to do. So why was this so difficult? Why wasn't I on the path to becoming successful?

## **WHY WOULDN'T ANYONE HIRE ME?!**

My friends and I were dealing with the same awful job market. All of us went to college, done pretty well academically, and had solid track records. Yet none of us could find any decent prospects. Our inboxes were full of emails from our parents, containing listings from CareerBuilder and Monster with job titles that we didn't want. All the good jobs seemed like they were being snatched up by recently laid off 35-year olds who were desperate and willing to take a cut in pay. The college grads were left to compete for jobs that barely required a pulse.

**"You gotta take what you can get in this market"** became the mantra of my peers. I stood in shock as someone who I'd partied with months prior proudly exclaimed that they'd been hired in sales at Verizon, and how excited they were to move up to middle manager in a few months...

What?!

Is this what we'd spent the last four years preparing for?

Did our degrees really count for nothing?

Were we doomed to lame 9-5 jobs and hating our lives right out of college?

Not one professor taught us how to buoy ourselves through a recession. And I had no idea what to do, except linger in unemployment and continue eating Hot Pockets twice a day.

\* \* \*

### **Fast-forward eight months...**

I was shell-shocked, realizing for the first time how far I'd actually come. In less than a year, I worked with four New York Times best-selling authors, a Hollywood producer, and several entrepreneurs. Venture capitalists and billion-dollar companies approached me with job offers. I no longer had to send out my resume; employers came to me first now. I actually reached a point where I was turning away work.

And the best part was that I was working on projects I actually cared about, with people I wanted to learn from. I was growing, and taking on jobs that typically were not reserved for people my age.

This was not the norm for a 22-year old in the heart of a recession.

What separated me from the recent graduate, sitting at home, unemployed for the last six months and no prospects on the horizon?

Or, what did I do different compared to the graduate who got a job and already hated their life less than a year into work?

Well, not much.

Anyone my age could have done what I did.

I'm not special or unique, and none of those jobs were handed to me. The only thing that still separates me from everyone else is that I know something they don't.

**The recession is not the obstacle.** The obstacle is to abandon conventional job-hunting methods. I took all the traditional advice I'd been given and ignored it. I did things differently, and it paid off.

*Everyone* is doing it all wrong, but I have a method that works.

\* \* \*

**Being "recession-proof" means:**

- ✓ The economy won't dictate what kind of job you think you can have.
- ✓ You aren't forced into soul-sucking work that causes you to hate your life in your early 20's.
- ✓ You can work with people who are a lot smarter than you and actually continue learning and growing.
- ✓ You can work on projects that you truly care about.



And most of all, it means you have greater control over what type of lifestyle you ultimately want to create for yourself.

**I'm going to show you how to make yourself recession-proof.**

If you apply the principles I recommend in the following pages, you'll be presented with more opportunities than you ever thought possible.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> If you'd prefer to watch a video summary of this book, visit [charliehoehn.com/speaking](http://charliehoehn.com/speaking).

## WARNING: THESE ARE NEW RULES

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*“It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is most adaptable to change.” – Charles Darwin*

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The principles I'm going to lay out in this book are not really being taught by anyone. I had to figure them out as I went along. So before I continue, I want to make something very clear:

**DON'T expect anyone else to understand these new rules for job hunting.**

Your family and friends won't get what you're doing, and they will encourage you to stick with the old method – shotgun blasting your resume to dozens of companies you couldn't care less about.

They'll offer outdated advice to you because *it's what they did*, and it will justify all of their past decisions.

You can listen to them if you want, but don't be surprised when you're working a job you don't care for two years later.

Most of you will do absolutely nothing during that first month after college. You'll want a break from the four years of higher education you just had, so go right ahead and enjoy some time off. Your friends will do the same. A few of them might take two or three months off. But after that first one, all of you will be acutely aware that you're unemployed and broke. So begins the job hunt.

But, where does one find these jobs? More importantly, where does one find a *good job*?

"It's a recession -- there are no good jobs, LOL!"

**First of all, there *are* good jobs.** In fact, there will *always* be good jobs. You're just looking in all the wrong places. Second, if you use the term "LOL," you deserve to be unemployed until you stop being a 13-year old girl. Saying "LOL" is the universal admission that you listen to the Jonas Brothers.

As I was saying: Career Builder, Monster, and Craigslist are the sites most graduates will use to search for jobs. And, what a shock, none of the offerings look very interesting.

That's because these three sites are where mediocrity thrives.

Anyone who expects great results from these websites is an idiot (admittedly, I was one of these idiots for a few weeks)

**Boring companies with unattractive offers lure stupid graduates like us into applying for their lame jobs because it seems like there's nothing better out there.**

The truth is that these sites are intended for the masses -- they have crappy listings by default.

Any promise of a halfway decent job will result in that company receiving *hundreds* of resumes.

Even bad listings will consistently get dozens of applications. And because your resume looks like everyone else's (white paper, portrait layout, Times New Roman 12-point font), you better have some insanely great credentials on yours.

But you won't BECAUSE YOU'RE A COLLEGE GRAD!

"Excellent communication skills"? Give me a break.

You do realize you're competing with people who've just been laid off with 10 years of experience and are willing to take a cut in pay, right? You're not going to win.

Job posting sites are like city bars. There are typically only a few really hot "offers" in the huge crowd, while the rest are fairly lackluster. And no matter which one you're looking at, there are a bunch of other guys with Ed Hardy shirts competing for them. It's exhausting, so you need to rethink your strategy.

And then you remember: "I have friends!"

Indeed, most of us do.

But yes, your group of friends (i.e. **your network**) is actually a much more solid route for finding a job. In fact, this is your best strategy for getting a job with the least amount of effort on your part.

If you really need to get a job right out of college, look for offers through your network.

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*I quickly figured out that the most important thing to do in college was to not focus on getting great grades, but to get out of the classroom and start working for people to build a solid portfolio.*

*I now work for a great startup business and I use everything I learned in those hustling days to market a business that I truly care about. My friends laugh at me because I wake up to go to work at 11am. The part they don't see is that I never mind going to work, or working until 2am, because I am still learning and loving life every day.*

- Nick Miller

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Not only do the people in your network know and trust you (unlike job posting sites where you're a faceless resume), they will actually *want* to help you find something decent.

**Decide on what kind of work you're interested in, and TELL PEOPLE about it.**

Ask your parents to talk to their friends. Ask your friends to talk to their parents. Then follow up with them on a regular basis to see if they've heard of anything interesting.

I guarantee you that someone knows somebody who's looking for extra help, *even in this economy*. You now know how to find a job with

relatively little effort on your part, but you're still left with a glaring problem: **finding work that you'll actually care about.**

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*I was frustrated by the set assumptions that there was one path to take after college. And, in the market we're in now, the common path is to "wait it out," which is foolish because it's a golden opportunity to act entrepreneurial. Practicing what I preach, I decided to start a business. The benefits have been that I'm working on something I love that's intellectually stimulating, building an incredible network, and I'm "self-employed" in a period when most of my friends are "unemployed" (aka sitting on their couch all summer).*

*The only rule is that there are no rules. No one is going to question a lapse in a resume for the next 3-5 years. My recommendation would be to use this time to create a story for yourself -- business, philanthropic, or otherwise.*

- Alex Mann

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Sometimes our network can present us with awesome opportunities, but that's not always the case.

The real question is: how can you find something that's both intellectually challenging and spiritually sustainable?

(I'll get to that in a few pages...)

There are other paths you can take after college, of course.

A lot of people go to grad school, which is painfully stupid in 95% of all situations. They put themselves in 6-figure debt, even though their earning potential will likely never rise substantially because they didn't attend a top-tier school. Two years and \$100K down the drain. Most people considering grad school would be far better served reading books on the [Personal MBA list](#) for the next two years.

Other people travel after they're done with college. This is great, and I fully support anyone who chooses to do it, but most of us don't have the funds to pull off expensive trips right away.

A tiny percentage of graduates try to start their own companies when they're done with school. Again, I think this is great if you have the emotional fortitude, but not everyone is cut out to be an entrepreneur.

I'd like to believe, however, that all of us want to work on things we genuinely care about and live a life that isn't being held back by a job we hate, right?

We all want to wake up excited for what we're about to work on, and go to sleep at the end of the day with a sense of pride and accomplishment...

## SO... WHAT SHOULD I DO?

Pay close attention here, because I'm about to mess you up with the truth.

In terms of rapidly advancing your career path and finding work that you actually care about, there is one option that stands above the rest. That option is...

**Free work.**

You might be thinking,

**"I've done free work. It's called an internship, guy. That's no secret."**

Well... not quite.

**An internship** is typically something you compete for with other applicants, much like a job.

And what's more important to note is that you apply for an internship the same way you apply for a job.

You send in a resume, do an in-person interview, and if you secure the internship, you're given menial work from 9-5. Enjoy grabbing coffee and filling out spreadsheets for the next three months, sucka. And by the way, there are no guarantees for a full-time position after the internship ends. Sorry!



**Free work** is a different approach altogether.

It allows you to work in whatever industry you want, and work on any projects you're interested in. And unlike an internship, there are no dead ends. If you follow the steps I lay out in the next section, you will be greeted with more opportunities than you would ever have through the traditional career approach.

While free work is great, and can quickly advance your career, there's another part to this equation.

The free work can and should be done *virtually* (a.k.a. remotely), so you can work with people who are in other parts of the country/world.

There are many reasons why this is a good idea, but the most important is that it removes nearly all of the risk for the potential employer.

Employers worry about wasting their time and money whenever they hire someone. With free work, you obviously remove the risk of money, but with *virtual* free work, you remove the risk of wasting their time.

If you're not in the same office as them, they don't have to spend a lot of time training you -- they don't even really have to think about you.

If you actually do quality work and stick with it long enough, they'll want to continue working with you (and eventually hire you). There's something extremely remarkable about a person who can consistently

and quickly complete tasks on their own, when they're in another state/country, without the looming pressure of a boss a few feet away.

From a psychological standpoint, free work is extremely powerful. This is because the employer's expectations are always going to be really low:

**Unproven college grad**  
**Working remotely**  
**+ Zero pay**

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**REALLY low expectations**

If you don't deliver, they will not be surprised or upset -- they almost expect it to happen.

You can use this dynamic to your advantage and dominate.

Don't believe me?

Consider this: Businessmen are positively delighted when they outsource a spreadsheet to Vietnam (or some other country), at a few bucks an hour, and the remote assistant emails them back with a completed assignment a day or two later.

**Now imagine the impact you can have if you do really high quality work, for absolutely free, on something more valuable that requires a creative flair.** They will be beyond ecstatic. You will suddenly seem

like a golden god, and they will praise you for rescuing them from the sea of mediocre job seekers.

Contrastingly, if you approached them expecting a high-paying gig right off the bat, they would have been slightly wary and approached the situation as a clear-cut business transaction.

They would draft up a contract, and maybe even an NDA (those are the kind of documents you want to deal with *after* you earn their trust, not before it).

And now there's pressure and the expectation that you will deliver greatness, no matter what.

They will be highly critical because you're working on their dime. You're no longer in control; they are. *Lame.*

The goal of free work is not so much to become friends with the person (although that can happen), but rather to build a healthy relationship and earn their trust. It's harder to do that if you approach them with a sales pitch right away.

**Virtual free work** also allows you to work in an environment you're comfortable with, so you can solely focus on producing quality work.

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*'Free work' = valuable, relationship-building apprenticeships in fields that YOU target, doing a job that YOU engineer.*

*To most people, it's a bad deal to put in a few months of free work (costing you about a few thousand \$\$'s worth of earnings) in exchange for an experience that YOU design and connections that can completely change your career. Yet, it's somehow a good idea to write a \$100,000 check to a grad school in exchange for a piece of paper and a few more years of your life where you don't have to think about the hard stuff.*

- Susan Su

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**When you do the free work remotely, you communicate with the person you're working for via email and the occasional phone call. Then you're given free reign to work at your leisure.**

You don't have to wake up at 6am. You don't have to eat lunch in a suit. You can work in whatever environment you're most comfortable in. The only things your employer wants are for you to do the work quickly, consistently, and correctly.

**Finally, virtual free work enables you to work as much, or as little, as you want.**

You can mitigate your risk by doing virtual free work for several people, instead of just one or two. And trust me: you'll want to work with more people than less -- one of them may not work out, but most of them will pay off if you stick with it long enough.

Like I said, the people you're working for will have low expectations. If you realize that the work isn't a good fit, you can walk away. No contracts broken, no money lost, and you're right back where you started.

Just be careful when you think about virtual free work in terms of how easy it is to walk away.

In my experience, most people flare out after one task or a single week's worth of free work. They lose interest, fail to see the long-term benefits, or would rather have any job that pays.

**The goal here, though, is not to be making money right away.**

At this point, you're just trying to build a foundation that will justify you making a lot of money *over the course of your entire career*, all while crafting the lifestyle you desire. Understand that it can take time to build that foundation. Even if you aren't making much money right away, you will eventually.

Which leads us to the fun part. Throw away your resume because you won't need it anymore. I'm going to teach you how to make yourself recession-proof.

Share this book



## STEP 0: STOP ACTING ENTITLED TO A PAYCHECK

This is step zero, because it shouldn't be a step at all.

For some reason, a lot of people our age think they deserve a hefty paycheck immediately just because they have a college degree. We feel as though we are worthy of a great, high-paying job the second we throw our graduation cap into the air. Perhaps this is because we've been given trophies our whole lives just for showing up. This mentality is toxic.

**We are not all winners, nor do we deserve to be treated as such just for existing.**

**You need to understand that college degrees are not given to unique snowflake children.**

They're given to the people who can afford them (generally speaking), and those who can pull off decent grades, averaged out over the course of four years.

You may have earned your college degree, but you haven't earned the right to be paid a lot of money, yet.

You have to prove your worth first. That's where Step 6 will come in.

## STEP 1: CHOOSE A FEW AREAS YOU'D LIKE TO WORK IN (AND A FEW PEOPLE YOU'D LIKE TO WORK WITH)

This is the first real step, and I know a lot of people struggle with it. Many of us get out of college and realize that we majored in something we don't really even care about.

Because we've been labeled with that major, we feel like we've been pigeonholed.

That doesn't have to be how it works, though.

**You *can* sidestep your way into almost any industry if you meet the right people and work with them.**

The real challenge, I think, is finding out what kind of lifestyle you want to create *in addition to what fields you are genuinely interested in.*

Those two areas should overlap, because you're probably going to be miserable if they don't.

For example, if you need to have a flexible lifestyle where you can travel a lot and work your own hours, then you shouldn't become a doctor or a lawyer.

Conversely, if you absolutely need structure in your workday and a steady paycheck, then you shouldn't quit your day job to become an entrepreneur.

**Stay true to yourself, and be mercilessly honest about what you really want.** If you know the career path you're walking on will eventually squelch your interests, your desired lifestyle, or your ability to have fun... just move on.

You only get one life, and you are far too young to succumb to misery. Fight for what you want while you're still in your early 20's, so you can have the lifestyle you dreamed of before you're in your 30's. The older we get, the more responsibilities and financial obligations will drop into our laps. **Now is the time to begin creating the life you desire... before it's too late.**

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## STEP 2:

### GET SOME SKILLS UNDER YOUR BELT

If your skill set on your resume consists of "Proficient in Microsoft Office," then you have no marketable skills. Knowing how to create a document, format a PowerPoint, or organize a spreadsheet are not things you can brag about -- those are things every employer expects, like knowing how to pronounce your own name, or remaining continent during office hours.



You need to have actual skills that are both in high demand (in your desired industry) and slightly difficult to learn. You'll be extremely valuable if your skill is both rare and in high demand.

Seriously, if you want to be making six figures right after college, go learn how to put out huge oil fires in the Middle East.

Is it miserable? Yes.

Is it a skill that's both rare and in high demand? Absolutely.

More realistically, iPhone app developers are cleaning up right now because it's a young industry with a high demand for people who know how to create good apps. There are a lot of versatile web developers who haven't learned the iPhone app coding language yet, so it's somewhat rare to find a developer who's both proficient in Cocoa and experienced in the app market.

Is Cocoa a difficult language to learn? Sure. Is it a highly valued skill right now that will lead to multiple offers? Indeed.

You don't have to become an expert in one particular area -- you just have to get really good at a few things.

I'm not an expert in video editing, or web design, or online marketing, but I'm solid at all three. Luckily, they are not mutually exclusive skills -- they complement each other and companies value them as a package deal.

**Think in terms of what skills your desired industry values, then start your learning.**

You can teach yourself new skills with books and hands-on experience, or you can sign up for a class at a community college. You can even find someone who has the skills already and beg to shadow them at work (this is how I learned Photoshop for free).

Having in-demand skills is what employers really value. Tons of experience is a bonus, of course, but it's not nearly as important as you might think.

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*David Ogilvy, the father of advertising, once asked a copywriter what books he had read about advertising: "He told me that he had not read any; he preferred to rely on his own intuition. 'Suppose,' I asked, 'your gall bladder has to be removed this evening. Will you choose a surgeon who has read books on anatomy, or one who relies on his intuition?'"*

*Nine months ago, I realized that I became the same employee that Oglivy hated. My dream was to create Internet marketing campaigns, but my resume peaked at "Proficient in Microsoft Office," a paltry qualification to dazzle employers. After several months of HTML to PHP tutorials, I've realized the immense power of mastering a technical skill-set. With the abundance of tutorials and resources online, it's a sad fact that few people have the drive to teach themselves the rudiments of their craft. And just like Oglivy, employers will respect those with the passion that do.*

- Matt Daniels, [mdaniels.com](http://mdaniels.com)

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## STEP 3: BUILD YOUR ONLINE PRESENCE

There's a simple fact that everyone who is graduating needs to come to grips with:

### **You will be Googled.**

No matter whom you're going to work for, they will enter your name into Google and see what comes up.

If you typed 'Charlie Hoehn' into Google in 2007, you would have seen that two of the top five results were pretty terrible. One was a video I submitted to CollegeHumor of my friend drunkenly riding a bicycle down a flight of stairs. The other was from an article in my school newspaper, where I'd been inaccurately quoted making fun of anti-abortion radicals who were protesting on campus.

That's right: 'drunk' and 'abortion' in my top five results. Not good, and far from representative of Charlie Hoehn: the man, the patron... the saint.

Now, when you Google my name, it's nothing but rainbows and sunshine.

**I was able to effectively bury my bad results with good ones by having a blog, signing up for various social networking sites, and putting out content that reflected pretty well on who I am as a person.**

It took a few months of work, to be sure, but it was a great investment of my time. There aren't a ton of Charlie Hoehns in the world, so I was able to own the top 10 Google search results for my name pretty easily.

Unless your name is something like John Smith or Megan Fox, you can usually own your top Google results within a few months.

There are a lot of ways to own your search results, but my favorite method is through blogging.

Unless you absolutely hate the act of writing, or are just an objectively terrible writer with no intentions to improve, you can really benefit from having a blog.

You can use it to write about what you're learning, or jot down your ideas, or post travel pictures, or even videos where you talk about the latest project you're working on.

**There are absolutely no rules to what you can put on your blog.** You just need to give people something positive to read and look at when they Google your name.

Why?

Because it can help establish trust before employers ever talk to you.

## How To Get Started With Your Own Blog

- A. **Go to Wordpress.com and click "Sign up now."**
- B. **Pick a domain.** You can choose any name for your blog, but I highly recommend setting your full name as the domain address (the benefits to this are obvious). To do this, enter your name as the username in the Sign up process. So if your name is Phil Sampson, have your user name be 'philsampson.' This sets your blog's address to philsampson.wordpress.com, which you can easily change to philsampson.com with a \$15 payment.
- C. **Start blogging.** You can post about anything you want. The point is to create a website that puts you in a very employable and positive light (unlike your Facebook account, which has pictures of you taking beer bong to the face).

If you want to use your blog as a way to get employers interested in you, I suggest you write about things that they'll find valuable and relevant. So you can write about your past experiences in a particular field, things you're learning about, current projects you're working on, etc. Just be honest and don't over-inflate your accomplishments.

An important thing to keep in mind, though, is the quality and frequency of your posts.

**Above all, you need to focus on putting out good content.**

A half-assed blog is more of a liability than anything. And I don't think it's super important to post really often – you just need to make it into a hobby you'll enjoy. If that means writing one long post every two weeks, so be it. Just make it a regular part of your routine while you're searching for work.

Dozens of people have offered me paid work after reading my blog. Many of them have flat-out said "I trust you" the first time I speak with them, and they're willing to pay me a higher rate simply because they already understand my thought process.

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## STEP 4:

### FIND A WAY TO PAY THE BILLS, CUT COSTS

For most people who want to pursue the free work route, I recommend working during the day at a temporary job that pays the bills. Either that, or find a way to make a lot of money in sporadic bursts.

At the end of the day, you need to find some way to make enough cash to cover your expenses. Doing free work is great, but as the name implies, you won't be making money from it for a while. You'll need to find one or more sources of income. This is where the skills you have will come in handy.

**Even if you have a boring day job, you can make extra income on the side by using the skills you've learned.** For me, I do online

marketing consulting, occasional website design work, and freelance video/audio editing.

As an aside: If you decide to take the freelancing route right out of college, then you better brace yourself because it's not easy.

You have to cut down on nearly all of your immaterial costs because there will be weeks, or sometimes months, where you won't make much money at all.

Big clients will sometimes bail on you or decide they don't need your help for the next several months. That can be devastating if you don't have a bunch of other clients lined up.

I'm telling you all this because, well, doing free work can be financially straining. It's not easy to see your friends buying multiple rounds of drinks for a bunch of people at the bar because they're getting a consistent paycheck each week.

At some point, you will want to stop with the free work and just get a normal job like everyone else. Ignore that temptation.

**When you're young and broke, money is a siren.**

It's alluring because you can have it right away if you get a run-of-the-mill, uninteresting 9-5 job, but you'll probably compromise your happiness over the long run.

**Doing free work will be tough on your bank account for a brief period, but you'll make huge gains in the future and will**

**simultaneously advance your career path in the direction you want it to go.**

Ultimately, it's your decision.

Do you want a steady paycheck at a job you're not crazy about, or are you willing to temporarily postpone payment in order to have access to amazing opportunities that will pay off big in a year or two?

\* \* \*

## STEP 5: RESEARCH YOUR TARGET, THEN REACH OUT TO THEM

Picking good targets to do free work for is arguably the most important step in this whole process. The key thing to keep in mind is that you want to aim high. Find people who are seemingly unreachable to a recent college graduate, and go after them.

**Because you're willing to work for free, your qualifications will matter less.**

You can approach the "high-hanging fruit" that no other graduates will be going after. Less competition means a better chance of you getting work.



In my opinion, a person taking the free work route should try to work for a successful entrepreneur who is still on the upswing. There are many reasons for this.

**First of all, entrepreneurs tend to move at a breakneck pace compared to the corporate world.** They are not interested in pushing papers; they want to get things done fast and make change happen. Their enthusiasm is contagious, and their work ethic is much stronger than your average employee at a big company.

These are the people you want to be around, because you will begin to absorb their attitude and work ethic. You will not regret the decision to expose yourself to their work process — you'll absorb some of their DNA and make it your own. Even if you don't want to become an entrepreneur yourself, you will still gain a lot from the experience.

**Secondly, there are a lot of entrepreneurs but only a fraction of them are successful.** The ones who are unproven are much riskier for you, because they may never succeed. Not only are they too poor to pay you, but there's also a decent chance that they will *always* be too poor to pay you. When you work with an entrepreneur who has already achieved success and now has their sights set even higher, you'll have a much better chance at being involved in a future success of theirs. Not a bad idea to hitch yourself onto a rising star.

It's fine to work with a brilliant inventor or a gifted artist, but if they know nothing about sales, or marketing, or running a business, they are going to have a really tough time sustaining their hobby. And you will run the risk of never getting paid for your efforts. You need to get

your foot in the door with people who know what the hell they're doing.

**Finally, matter what you're interested in — photography, architecture, cooking, fashion, etc. — the people in your field who are earning the most are all *successful entrepreneurs*.** They were all able to turn their skills into viable businesses, and found ways to make their passion profitable.

Every person I've done free work for has been a self-made entrepreneur, because that's what I wanted to become. I was a genuine fan of their work, knew all about their past projects, and researched them extensively to figure out what problems they were facing, and how I might be able to help.

**So... where does one find successful entrepreneurs?**

Think about the products / services you use regularly and love, or the companies that you buy from repeatedly throughout the year. Those businesses were created by entrepreneurs. You can do research on them and figure out which ones might be easy to approach and receptive to free work.

Of course, that task might seem too broad or difficult. And if you live in the mid-West, the only companies you can think of are Wal-Mart and Best Buy, so you're out of luck there.

If you can't think of any entrepreneurs, take a look at [Kickstarter projects that are ending soon](#).<sup>2</sup> Kickstarter projects that receive over \$100K in funding — or get 200%+ funding — clearly have some level of demand. The people who are running these projects are likely freaking out about having to fill all those orders, and are wondering how they're going to pull this off. Many of them are under more pressure than they've ever dealt with.

The sweet smell of opportunity is in the air...

If you find a project that you love, and the people running it seem like genuinely good folks who know what they're doing, then you can reach out and offer to help.

Before you reach out, however, you need to do *a lot* of research on them. This will ensure that you don't sound like an idiot when you introduce yourself, and will prove that you are extremely familiar with who they are and what they value.

I prefer reaching out to people with a large online presence, because so much of who they are and what they're working on is available to me through a quick Google search. I'll often spend hours researching someone before I email him or her.

At this point, you have your target picked, you are interested in their project, and you've done your research. You know you can benefit them in a big way... but how should you contact them?

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<sup>2</sup> In case you've been living under a rock: Kickstarter is a crowd-funding platform that allows people to raise money for creative projects. In 2012 (when the site was just three years old), they helped artists and entrepreneurs raise over \$319 Million for their projects, from more than 2 million donors in 177 countries.

Simple. Just send them an email:

***SUBJECT: I want to work for you, for free***

*Hi [name],*

*I'm a huge fan of your [work / company], and I really believe in your mission to [prove you understand why they do what they do]. Your work is important, and I'd love to help you reach the next level.*

*The reason I'm emailing is to offer you my [professional skill that you have] services. Specifically, I would love to [some project that you can handle remotely], which will ultimately help you [increase sales / reduce costs / make customers happier].*

*The reason I think this will help is because I noticed you've been [allude to the extensive research you've done on them, and the potential problems they'll face if you don't help them].*

*I'd like to work on this project for the next two weeks. I can send you a brief email every other day with an update on my progress. I don't normally discount my rates, but for this project, I'm willing to do it for free.*

*Here is a sample of the quality you can expect from me:*

*[Link to your portfolio, or previous work you've done]*

*If you don't like my work at the end of these two weeks, you can scrap it and move on. No money lost for you, and no hard feelings from me. But if you do like my work, I'd love to discuss setting up some more work for me to do.*

*Would you be interested in this? Please let me know. As soon as I have the green light, I'll get started. I can be reached at [phone number].*

Can you see how tempting that offer is for any employer?

**Whatever ideas I propose will somehow be tied to skills of mine, but phrased in a way that's beneficial to the person I'm emailing.**

I make sure to explicitly say why the proposal would improve their current efforts, and why they need *me* to execute.

I also make sure to propose ideas that are valuable *in the employer's terms*. I DON'T just say "Hey there, I've got these skills, you should pay me for them!"

Instead, I ask myself: "How can I frame my skills in a way that's highly valuable to this person?"

**Very few job seekers take the time to actually put themselves in the shoes of the people they want to work for.** That's why this is one of the best ways for you to differentiate yourself and stand above the

crowd. Even if the potential employer thinks your ideas are slightly flawed, you will still be very hard to turn down.

**You still might be skeptical, wondering why on earth you should offer free work to an amateur entrepreneur or artist...**

For one, a lot of them are doing really cool stuff. I hear people complain all the time about not wanting to work for a soul-sucking boring company.

Well, Kickstarter is a huge community of creative people working on things they're passionate about. Some of them raise a TON of money, but are too inexperienced and overwhelmed to pull everything off. Even though they might have a viable business on their hands, they're still in the early stages where failure is likely. If only they could find a talented partner to work with...

Why not figure out what their biggest problems and stumbling blocks are going to be, then reach out with an offer to help?

If you can actually DELIVER what you're promising, then they will have more to lose by not paying you than you'll have to lose. They will want to keep you around.

I'm not making this strategy up. I've had a handful of friends reach out to total strangers on Kickstarter, and successfully find themselves working on stuff they loved. My buddy was sick of his 9-5 job at Wells Fargo, so he reached out to a filmmaker on Kickstarter. He ended up traveling around South America for a month, shooting footage, and

ended up as a subject in the documentary. He said it was the best decision he'd ever made.

If you really want to work on something unique and meaningful, [Kickstarter](#) is a great place to start. The goal is to work with people who can step up your game, help you develop skills that you want to master, present you with experiences you crave, and connect you with more folks who are just like them.

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## STEP 6: TRANSITION TO PAID WORK

Before you set up a deal for doing long-term free work, you have to set a deadline for when the "free work" transitions to "paid work."

If four weeks is your limit, say that you want to either transition to paid work by then, or have them help you move towards even more challenging and lucrative opportunities through connections they have in their network.

It's important to lay down these expectations right after you've done enough great work to have gained the person's trust. Otherwise, you'll condition them to expect free work indefinitely. Not good.

**Be appreciative at the opportunity they're affording you, but make it clear that you're also in a financially tight spot.**

Let them know that, at some point, you'll need to switch to some form of reimbursement for your hard work.

Here's what you can say:

*Hi [client's name],*

*We've been working together for [number of weeks] now, and I'm thrilled with everything we've accomplished so far. Since we first started, we've [list results you've driven for their business, goals you've hit, impact you've made, etc.]. I've also learned some priceless lessons along the way, like [something you learned while working with this person]. The whole experience has been invaluable to me, and I really appreciate you giving me a fair shot.*

*My free trial run is coming to an end, but I would love to keep working with you. Going forward, I will continue working on projects that will move you toward your goals and help bring your business to the next level. In fact, the next project I'd love to tackle is [some idea for work that you know will be valuable to them].*

*The only change, of course, is that I would be charging for my services from this point forward.*

***Are you still interested in working together on a paid basis?*** Please let me know what you think. Either way, I'm extremely grateful for the opportunity, and I wish you all the best in the future.



Assuming you've done a great job so far, they will want to keep you around. You've proven the value of your work, they trust you, and they know it will be a hassle finding and training someone else who can fill your role (after all, great help is hard to find).

**People won't take advantage of you unless you let them.** Be assertive and don't get into a long-term deal with someone unless you're both comfortable with the agreement. If you're truly valuable and work hard, they'll have more to lose by not taking care of you than you will by working for free.

And that, my friends, is how you become a recession-proof graduate.

\* \* \*



[Charlie Hoehn](#) is an author, marketing strategist, videographer, speaker, and play enthusiast. After graduating from Colorado State University in 2008, he went on to work with a number of bestselling authors such as Ramit Sethi, Seth Godin, and Tucker Max. He worked alongside Tim Ferriss during the production and launch of *The 4-Hour Body*, which hit #1 on the New York Times bestseller list and sold over a million copies.

Charlie's work has been featured by *The New York Times*, *NPR*, *CBS*, *TEDx*, *Wordpress*, *Gizmodo*, *Huffington Post*, and *Business Insider*. Since its release in 2009, *Recession-Proof Graduate* has been downloaded more than 150,000 times. Charlie is currently finishing up a full-length version of the book in Austin, Texas.

Want more free career advice? [Click here](#) to join 4,600 people who are signed up for my newsletter.

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