**10 things I wish I knew when I graduated college**

**James Beriker, for CNBC***7:30 a.m. EDT May 17, 2014*

*(Photo: Thinkstock)*

 1224**CONNECT**[176](https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?url=http://usat.ly/1gzLjPX&text=10%20things%20I%20wish%20I%20knew%20when%20I%20graduated%20college&via=usatoday" \t "_blank)**[TWEET](https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?url=http://usat.ly/1gzLjPX&text=10%20things%20I%20wish%20I%20knew%20when%20I%20graduated%20college&via=usatoday" \t "_blank)**[73](http://www.linkedin.com/shareArticle?url=http://usat.ly/1gzLjPX&mini=true" \t "_blank)**[LINKEDIN](http://www.linkedin.com/shareArticle?url=http://usat.ly/1gzLjPX&mini=true" \t "_blank)** 10**COMMENTEMAILMORE**

*We asked James Beriker, CEO of Simply Hired, to give his commencement speech with advice for the Class of 2014. Ladies and gentlemen, James Beriker*.

Let me first congratulate you on your graduation! Be very proud of your accomplishment today. Relish it.

You have done a lot of hard work to arrive at this moment. With that degree in your hand, your real life begins today. You are now one of us.

You are leaving the safety and structure of college to enter the world of work. From this day forward, nothing will seem familiar to you. There are no classes, exams, grades, or a degree at the end of the next four years. You don't get the summer off. This next phase is unstructured, and your success will be determined by the choices you make.

**WORDS TO LIVE BY:**[Best graduation speeches EVER](http://www.cnbc.com/id/101633159)

**$30,000:**[Average student loan burden hits hard](http://www.cnbc.com/id/101677274)

**JOBS OUTLOOK:**[Millennials face tough time](http://www.cnbc.com/id/101660087)

So, as you move into what must seem like an uncertain future, let me share with you the 10 things I wish I knew when I graduated college:

**1. Have a plan — and change it often.** You have all been taught to "have a plan." Go to this high school, take those classes, achieve those grades, go to that college, take that major. When you graduate, get that job, make that salary, get promoted and work your way up the ladder.

While having a plan is good for providing structure and focus, life never follows a plan. There are always twists and turns — and a plan never accounts for how you evolve and change as you move through your life.

So, have a plan and use it as a rough road map. Understand that any plan is a reflection of what you think your plan is at a particular moment in time — and be prepared to change it radically and often.

**2. Be the most authentic version of yourself — all the time.** If you want to be an actor, go to Hollywood. Everyone else: be who you really are.

You will bring different parts of yourself to work than you do at home or with your family or friends, but you should be your real self all the time. Don't adopt personas. Don't read a book about Steve Jobs and decide you want to be like Steve Jobs. There is only one Steve Jobs, and there is only one you. Figure out what is important to you and who you want to be in the world, and live that as honestly as you can. Choose industries, jobs, colleagues, friends and life partners based on who you really are. Don't put yourself in a position where you have to be an actor. It won't work.

**3. Your first job should be about experience.** The best first jobs are not always the highest paid jobs or at top companies or in the best places to live. Your first job should provide the opportunity to work with great people you can learn from, where you receive on-the-job training on a set of core skills, where there is the opportunity for you to develop and grow for at least three years (yes, think in terms of three years), and where success means improving your personal brand. My first job out of law school had none of these attributes. I took a job based on salary, worked really hard but learned very little, and wasted 8 months.

**4. There's no such thing as "work-life balance."** If you want to work with great people, solve tough problems and leave the world better off because of your work, you can't have "work-life balance." If you're at a start-up or want to invent a new technology or discover a cure for a disease, it is all consuming. If you are on that path, work is your life. I'm not saying that you can't go to yoga, or play a sport, or have a social life or even a family; but, for certain periods of your life, you should plan to be out of "balance." If you try to "balance," you will only set yourself up for failure and disappoint yourself and those around you — and something will break.

**5. There are no short-cuts.** There is no express train to success. Work hard to master something (law, sales, teaching, software development, graphic design, furniture making), create circumstances to be successful (move to the right city, work at the right company, work with the right people, work on the right projects, have a great mentor), and remain open to new opportunities to develop and grow. Think of it as cultivating the land, planting seeds, and harvesting the crops. It takes time, commitment and focus.

**6. Take measured risks.** So many of you will choose to "play it safe" by doing what your parents and friends would do. But, if you are presented with an opportunity to step out of your comfort zone and take a measured risk — a start-up, a job that is a stretch, a move to a new city, or a career transition — don't dismiss it outright. Instead, ask yourself: what will I learn, whether I am successful or not in this new opportunity that I cannot learn in my current situation? I practiced law for the first eight years of my career. When I stopped having fun, I took the opportunity to start a company. It was a huge risk, and some people thought I was crazy. It was the best thing I ever did.

**7. Have great mentors.** There is nothing more impactful on your career and personal development than having great mentors — people who have experience in your field and are willing to guide you, provide you with real feedback, and help you grow. The thing that a great mentor can do is offer a different perspective on something you are thinking through based on their experience, or ask you the tough questions, or make that introduction. Find a mentor and openly engage with him or her. I've been fortunate to have a few really great mentors in my career and know that I would not have been able to develop into the person that I am without their influence.

**8. Be the kind of person everyone wants on their "War Room" team.** There are a group of them in every company: the kind of people you want on your biggest, most urgent problems. They are junior and senior members of the team — and come from all parts of the business. They are creative, thoughtful, assertive, natural leaders and function well inside teams. They are humble but have just enough ego that they can't fail. They are the first to get called on when there is a challenge, and the last to go if there is a layoff. Become one of these people.

**9. Follow your passion.** Like so many of my generation, I went to law school because it was the "right" thing to do. What first-born son of an immigrant family wouldn't go to law school if given the opportunity? I chose law school over a Masters program in the UK, probably for the wrong reason. I don't necessarily regret going to law school, but I do regret not having the experience of studying in England.

So, as I tell my four daughters: experience life fully, find that thing that drives you, immerse yourself in it and, above all, work on things that you are passionate about. To be truly engaged — and, ultimately be successful, however you define success — you must engage both your head and your heart.

**10. Be gracious.** This final one is about how you carry yourself. You are among the luckiest in our society. You have an education and the world is, in fact, "your oyster." As you make your way through it, be humble and gracious. Open doors for people — both literally and figuratively. Say hello to the maintenance guy. As smart and tough and confident as you are, and as full of promise your future is, you will learn that a little kindness goes a long way.

So, as you take this step into the world, take a look back at what you have accomplished here, and be proud. Be thankful to those who helped you get here. Look to the future with an open heart and open mind. But, be measured and thoughtful. Finally, as you move into your future, do so with passion and exuberance — and always remember to read that e-mail twice before hitting "send."

*Commentary by James Beriker, the CEO of job-search site Simply Hired (www.simplyhired.com). He is also a board member at iSocket and EyeView, two advertising-technology startups. Follow him on Twitter @jberiker*.

*©*[*CNBC*](http://www.cnbc.com/)*is a*USA TODAY*content partner offering financial news and commentary. Its content is produced independently of*USA TODAY*.*