

# **RECESSION-PROOF**

# **GRADUATE**

**CHARLIE HOEHN'S GUIDE  
TO GETTING ANY JOB  
WITHIN A YEAR OF  
FINISHING COLLEGE**

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## WHY WOULDN'T ANYONE HIRE ME?!

### I had done everything "the right way."

**From first grade to my senior year of college, my record had remained virtually flawless.** My overall GPA had landed around 3.8. My SAT and ACT scores were high, I had been 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 had 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. There were actually two companies that had been 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 had happened? 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/yr 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) had 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?!

## WHY WOULDN'T ANYONE HIRE ME?!

**Not one professor had taught us how to buoy ourselves through a recession.**

**My friends and I were dealing with the same awful job market.** All of us had gone 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 had 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.

# WHY WOULDN'T ANYONE HIRE ME?!

**Billion-dollar companies had approached me with job offers.**

## **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 had worked with four New York Times best-selling authors, a Hollywood producer, and several entrepreneurs. Venture capitalists and billion-dollar companies had approached me with job offers. I no longer had to send out my resume; employers came to me first now. I had 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 had taken all the advice everyone had given me and ignored it. I did things differently, and it paid off.

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

## Make yourself recession-proof.

### 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.

Sound good?

My name is Charlie Hoehn. I'm 23 years old, and I made myself recession-proof within a year of graduating college.

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

Apply the principles I used, and you'll soon find yourself with more opportunities at your feet than you ever thought possible.

## WARNING: THESE ARE NEW RULES

### The new rules aren't being taught by anyone.

**“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

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 (sucks for me, great for you).

So I have to make something very clear before you read on:

**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.

## GETTING A JOB: THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY

### There will always be good jobs.

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.

# GETTING A JOB: THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY

## Don't compete with 35 year olds.

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!"

Congratulations, 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.**

### **Building a portfolio to get a job**

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.

-NIKC MILLER of  
<http://myrender.com>

## What about finding work that you'll actually care about?

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*.

### **Choosing your own path**

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 of**  
<http://alexjmann.com>

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

**So how can we find something that's both intellectually challenging and spiritually sustainable?**

Well, I'll get to that in a bit.

## We all want to wake up excited for our work.

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 will put themselves in 6-figure debt, and their earning potential will not go up substantially because they didn't attend a top-tier school. Two years and \$100K down the drain. Most people considering grad school would be better served watching lectures on [Academic Earth](#) and 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.**

### Self-education

I learned more from my Google Reader than I ever did in graduate school.

I spent weekday evenings digesting what I read and crafting my own blog posts. I was essentially teaching myself an additional skill set, one that none of my classmates would have.

Did it pay off? My CEO never saw my resume, yet here I am playing at the intersection of two of my greatest passions: sports and marketing. In a terrible economy where some of my peers (with masters degrees, mind you) are working miserable jobs that they hate, I'm working for a company with clients like Shaq, Danica Patrick, and ESPN. But I don't know. Maybe I should have paid more attention in class.

**-RYAN STEPHENS of**

<http://ryanstephensmarketing.com/blog>

### Free work: zero competition, projects you love, and no dead-ends.

**Now pay close attention to what I'm going to say next, 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. On top of that, there are no dead ends. If you follow the steps I lay out at the end of this e-book, you will be greeted with more opportunities than you would have ever had if you'd taken the traditional career approach.

### “I’d like to work on Project X for you, *for free.*”

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 for this. The most important reason 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.

In fact, when you're setting up a deal for free work, you can even say to them:

"I'd like to work on Project X for you.

I'll work on it for the next two weeks, and send you a brief email every other day with an update on my progress.

You don't have to spend any time training me; just give me a little direction upfront, and some occasional feedback on my email updates to make sure I'm on the right track.

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 like to discuss setting up some more work for me to do."

### Rescue your employer from a sea of mediocre job seekers.

Do you know how tempting that deal is for any employer?

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**

---

**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.

## A high-paying gig or free work?

Contrastingly, if you had 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.

### Graduate school vs. Free work

'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 of  
<http://susansu.com>

### Throw away your resume, you won't need it anymore.

**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.

## SIX STEPS TO BECOMING RECESSION-PROOF

**You have to prove your worth.**

**STEP 0) Stop acting like you're 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.

## SIX STEPS TO BECOMING RECESSION-PROOF

### What kind of lifestyle do you want to create?

**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.**

# SIX STEPS TO BECOMING RECESSION-PROOF

## Get yourself some skills.

**If you know the career path you're walking on will eventually squelch your interests or desired lifestyle, 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.**

### **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.

### **The importance of skills**

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 Ogilvy 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 Ogilvy, employers will respect those with the passion that do.

**-MATT DANIELS of**  
<http://mdaniels.com>

## SIX STEPS TO BECOMING RECESSION-PROOF

**You don't have to be an expert, but you do have to be good.**

**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.

## SIX STEPS TO BECOMING RECESSION-PROOF

**You don't have to be an expert, but you do have to be good.**

### **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 a year ago, 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.**

# SIX STEPS TO BECOMING RECESSION-PROOF

**Your blog gives people something positive to read when they Google you.**

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.**

## The value of a blog

Since I started blogging on my own I've been cited or linked to by other bloggers like Robert Scoble, Steve Rubel, Tom Peters, Lifehacker, etc. Some individuals find this to be the end game ("I have 1,000 followers", "I've been on the homepage of Digg"). I argue that while connecting with fellow bloggers is certainly valuable, it's also your means to build momentum. I'm not saying you're "using" people to build your presence, I'm suggesting that the Internet is much like everyday life: it's about who you know.

As you gain attention and build new connections you'll see your opportunities snowball. I went from a no-name blogger to a trusted source, which ultimately landed my dream job. Just over a year ago I reached out to a fellow Denver blogger and WordPress guru, Alex King. We had a quick lunch together, our first encounter offline, and by then he already felt he knew me through my online presence. Within a few weeks, he created a new position and hired me.

**-DEVIN REAMS of**  
<http://devin.reams.me>

# SIX STEPS TO BECOMING RECESSION-PROOF

## How to get started with your own blog.

**a) Go to Wordpress.com and click "Sign up now."** Some people use Blogger, others use Tumblr, but I've found Wordpress has the cleanest look and most flexibility for customization.

[Note: If you want a blog that's really easy and even simpler than Wordpress, use [Tumblr](#) or [Posterous](#). Those two are the user-friendliest of all the different platforms.]

**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 will set your blog's address to philsampson.wordpress.com, which you can easily convert into philsampson.com with a \$15 payment.

Obviously, if your name is very common, you probably won't be able to own that domain and will have to choose something else.

**c) Start blogging.** You can post about anything you want.

The main 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.

## SIX STEPS TO BECOMING RECESSION-PROOF

### Brace yourself because it's not easy.

I've had several people offer me work after they read 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. Believe me when I say: [having a blog can be a powerful thing](#).

#### **STEP 4) Find a way to pay the bills, and 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.

## SIX STEPS TO BECOMING RECESSION-PROOF

### Postpone getting paid now, for amazing opportunities later.

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, and 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.

## SIX STEPS TO BECOMING RECESSION-PROOF

### Pick your target.

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. These are the people you want to be around, because you will begin to absorb their attitude and work ethic.

**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.

The best way to determine a person's future behavior is by looking at their past behavior. So work with people who have already achieved some degree of success.

### 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. [For instance, [here's how I used Delicious bookmarks](#) to research someone who ended up hiring me.]

Now you have your target picked. They're working on a project that you are interested in, and you've done your research. You know you can benefit them in a big way... but how should you contact them?

**Simple: just send them an email.**

## SIX STEPS TO BECOMING RECESSION-PROOF

Write them an email that goes something like this.

**1. Greeting**

**2. Courteous introduction** that shows your genuine interest and delicately alludes to all the research you've done on them

**3. Several specific examples** of free work you could do that will have a measurable impact on them

**4. Your call-to-action:**

**“If you like these ideas, I’m happy to do them. I’d also love to talk to you about the possibility of doing more projects with you in the future. Can you talk this week?”**

**5. Sign off**

**Doing free work is about building healthy relationships with people you want to learn from and work on projects you’re interested in. So be genuine.**

## SIX STEPS TO BECOMING RECESSION-PROOF

### Propose ideas that are valuable in the employer's terms.

**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 ideas would improve their current efforts, and why they need *me* to execute those ideas.

Even if the person thinks my thought process is slightly flawed, the email will still be very hard to turn down.

**Very few job seekers take the time to actually put themselves in the shoes of the people they want to work for.**

Yet this is one of the best ways for you to differentiate yourself and stand above the crowd.

I make sure to propose ideas that are valuable *in the employer's terms*. I **DON'T** just say

**"Hey, I've got these skills, you should pay me for them."**

**Write emails to a few people you want to work for with this mentality:**

**"How can I frame my skills in a way that's highly valuable to this person?"**

You'll be surprised at how people respond to you.

**If you want a detailed script for emails like this, sign up for the Recession-Proof Grad mailing list [here](#).**

## SIX STEPS TO BECOMING RECESSION-PROOF

### Free work becomes paid work.

**Finally, before you set up a deal for doing long-term free work, you have to lay down a deadline for when the "free work" transitions to "paid work."**

If three months 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 after you've done some work and 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.

**People will not 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



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