

## RECEIVING a NEW DEGREE? EITHER USE IT OR LOSE IT!

by R.J. Porter

It seems almost as though every month one or more of our colleges or universities award degrees to deserving and deservedly proud new graduates. If you recently received one, or are the proud parent of the recipient, whether a Bachelor's or an advanced degree, be aware that pride cometh before the fall. Don't let the warm glow of satisfaction keep you from achieving your goal: **getting a long-term return on the investment of time, money and lost opportunities.**

An article I read a few years ago pointed out that colleges and universities (in the USA alone) graduate one million new Bachelor degrees each year . . . **plus** 400 thousand advanced degrees. And what awaits these **1.4 million** proud owners of educational recognition? And at that point, with a better economy, there were **less than a million new jobs waiting for them!** And I doubt if that major shortage of positions has improved... even fact I'd bet it's worse! There's no time to sit and bask in the glow of a job well done. There's no time for a well-earned vacation!@ It's time to move!

While the newly degreed student seeking their first position is at grave risk (30+% will experience underemployment), it is the older graduates who more frequently lose the benefits they worked so hard to achieve. Not because it's unavoidable, but because they fail to recognize the volatility of their situation. **A new degree is like a booster rocket** . . . a strong but short lived initial thrust.

A new degree, for an experienced worker, should signal a serious career minded individual. **BUT!** *If the degree gets old, it gets cold.* Prospective employers may devalue the degree and the effort behind it if they perceive the individual did nothing to change their career situation at graduation.

To understand the importance of perception, you need only talk to the thousands of individuals who have achieved academic advancement only to see it ignored by their employers. Sadly the reason always escapes the individual: *the company already knows what the individual can or cannot do and a piece of paper will not alter that belief.* Parents and friends may congratulate you at graduation but they don't treat you differently. They place little or no additional importance on your side of a discussion just because you have that new degree. *If your company hasn't encouraged you during your efforts and recognized your accomplishment in a tangible way (new title, promotion, new responsibilities); it's probably time to move on, or stay mired in the same situation.*

The experienced individual must recognize the addition of a degree, graduate or bachelor's, **enhances their existing skill base, it does not create a new one.** There is proof in every ad you read: must have **xx years** of experience. This new credential will in some instances remove an obstacle to additional employment options but will not open doors in and of itself. Companies hire only when they perceive it to be a benefit to them. Degrees are indicative of knowledge and stick-to-itiveness, not the ability to perform in the real world. Proper presentation then is vital, but so is the demonstrated desire to affect change.

With your hot off the press@ degree in your hand, begin immediately to locate your next career opportunity. Try to develop new and different options for yourself, *options that will include increased responsibilities as well as increased earnings.* A new title may be an important issue in this plan as it would demonstrate advancement in a very tangible manner. Two or three years down the road that new title may translate into even more dollars and further advancement opportunities. Graduation is the beginning of the journey, not the end. Don't miss the bus because you took too long getting to the terminal.

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