

## CHAPTER 2

### Some Good Reasons To Go To College

**“I knew that they were setting me up to lay me off so I decided that I would go. If they offered me that (severance) package then I would leave and go back to school full time.”**

*Linda W., 41, started at a community college in 1979, returned to that community college in 1994, earned her Associate's Degree in 1997 and transferred to a private 4 year school. She earned her Bachelor's Degree a few years later.*

#### **A changing workplace.**

It's no secret that the workplace in America is not the same as it used to be. In the 60s, 70s, even into the 80s, once you landed a job with a corporation - particularly a large, multinational blue chip company - you were pretty much assured of lifetime employment if you behaved yourself. And if you did your job reasonably well, you could generally count on periodic promotions and increases in pay.

At the end of maybe 30 or 40 years or so, they'd throw you a big party, give you a gold watch and send you a nice retirement check every month. And you'd still be young enough (and hopefully healthy enough) to enjoy a number of years without the need to work every day.

Those days are gone.

Corporations these days seem to be much more interested in the bottom line and producing dividends for shareholders than they are in keeping employees, even the good, faithful employees who worked their butts off. No one's job seems safe. Many believe that this new era calls into question the entire concept of loyalty to a corporation. A lot of people have come to the conclusion that being devoted to a particular company is at least silly and probably even dangerous. It's every man and woman for themselves.

Whether that blanket indictment applies to you or not only you can decide. But just to be on the safe side you should probably be as well equipped as possible to make your own way in the employment market. These days you just don't know whether you're going to have a job tomorrow. You probably can't trust your employer, at least not many of them. Many employers large and small have shown a rather complete disregard for the welfare of their employees. Your company might be different. But the odds don't appear good.

What is a good bet is that sometime during your 40+ year working career you will be out of a job: the company changes direction and no longer needs your skills and fires you, it goes belly-up, is absorbed by another corporation that lets you go, working conditions become just intolerable and you quit.

It doesn't matter how it happens. One day you are employed, the next day you aren't. Where do you go from there?

**“I became disabled on my job working as a secretary in a law firm. ...My doctor told me to get into another line of work.”**

*Evelyn S., 41, originally started college in 1975 and returned in 1995 to work on her Bachelor's Degree. She earned that and went on for her Master's.*

#### **College graduates just have more options**

If you have a college education you have a lot more employment possibilities than the person who does not have that education. Why? Because college graduates are in a minority - there just aren't that many of them. In general it's the college graduates who run this country (and the rest of the world) and the companies and organizations in it. If you are a college graduate you have a high probability of winding up as a manager, while those without a college education have a good chance of reporting to those of us who do. That's just the way the world is: education produces benefits.

On average, only about one person in four over the age of 25 graduates from college, as Table I shows. You are a relatively rare individual if you have a Bachelor's degree. And that education makes you more valuable to a prospective employer.

**TABLE I**  
**EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF PEOPLE**  
**25 YEARS OLD AND OLDER, BY SEX:**

MARCH, 2000 (Numbers in thousands)

	Both Sexes		Male		Female	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Educational Attainment						
Total population 25+	175,230	100.0	83,611	100.0	91,620	100.0
None	851	0.48	396	0.47	455	0.51
Elementary: 1-4	1,891	1.08	945	1.13	945	1.03
Elementary: 5-6	3,542	2.02	1,738	2.08	1,804	1.97
Elementary: 7-8	5,896	3.36	2,839	3.40	3,057	3.34
High school: 1	3,680	2.10	1,761	2.11	1,919	2.09
High school: 2	4,975	2.84	2,276	2.72	2,700	2.95
High school: 3	7,019	4.00	3,261	3.90	3,759	4.10
High school grad	58,086	33.15	26,651	31.88	31,435	34.31
Some college, no degree	30,753	17.55	14,540	17.39	16,213	17.70
Associate degree: occupational program	7,221	4.12	3,224	3.86	3,998	4.36
Associate degree: academic program	6,471	3.69	2,729	3.26	3,742	4.08
Bachelor's degree	29,840	17.03	14,909	17.83	14,931	16.30
Master's degree	10,396	5.93	5,166	6.18	5,230	5.71
Professional degree	2,586	1.48	1,752	2.10	834	0.91
Doctorate degree	2,023	1.15	1,425	1.70	599	0.65

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, P20-536, *Educational Attainment of People 25 Years Old and Older*, March 2000 Current Population Survey.

<http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/education/p20-536/tab01.txt>

If you are a professional - an engineer, a lawyer, a medical doctor, nurse, an accountant or some other licensed white collar worker - at least you have a good handle on what type of job you will be looking for. And you probably have an equally good idea of what type of organization hires your sort of person. You are pre-qualified for those new jobs by virtue of the fact that you have that particular degree.

Though probably not quite as well off as the professionals, those of us with a plain old Bachelor's degree are still pretty employable. We've learned how to do a lot of things in college, and potential employers know that.

The people who only got through high school have a much bigger problem in terms of their employment prospects. Not that it's ever easy for anyone, with any level of education, to get reestablished in the job market after being let go. It's not.

But people with college degrees - any kind of college degree - usually do better. They have already demonstrated to the world that they know how to set a goal and get to it. And that is particularly true for someone who can brag - yes, brag! - that they put themselves through college as an adult, one course at a time, often on their own nickel, and that they were willing and able to slog through that project, even though it took five, six, seven or more years.

What does that tell a prospective employer? For that matter, what does that positive, "I can do this" attitude tell your current employer?

**“So I find that because I have more confidence, I’ve been able to put more of myself into all the work that I do - parenting work and my real job and all the other stuff that I do.”**

*Patrick A. finished his Bachelor’s degree with a 3.6 GPA.*

Think about this. Being able to get through college at 30, 40, 50 or so, while raising a family and working, is a stunning personal accomplishment. It is one that no 22 year old recent graduate can brag about.

But you can.

And that makes you a better employee. Will that accomplishment keep you from getting fired? Maybe. If it comes down to choosing between you and someone who didn’t do what you did, the odds favor you.

Will it automatically get you a new job if you are somehow turned loose from a company? There are no guarantees, of course. But being able to brag about how you went through school will definitely deliver a lot of extra points in that job interview. It shows a level of perseverance and commitment to a goal that a lot of people just don’t have.

Are job flexibility and future employability the only reasons to go to college? No. Although they are certainly important, the big reason for many people is money, pure and simple.

### **College graduates make a lot more money**

The simple fact is that college graduates make more money than people with two-year degrees, who in turn make more money than people with high school educations. Some numbers are in order to support that.

**TABLE II**  
**Median Incomes of Various Educational Levels**  
**Year-Round, Full-Time Workers**  
**2000 Data (US Dollars)**

	Males	Difference from Previous Level		Females
		Male	Female	
Less than 9th grade	20,789			15,978
9th - 12th grade, no diploma	25,095	4,306	1,941	17,919
HS Grad (includes equivalency)	34,303	9,208	7,051	24,970
Some college, no degree	40,337	6,034	3,727	28,697
Associate degree	41,952	1,615	2,374	31,071
Bachelor's degree	56,334	14,382	9,344	40,415
Master's degree	68,322	11,988	9,724	50,139
Doctorate degree	80,250	11,928	6,942	57,081
Professional degree	99,411	19,161	1,876	58,957

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, P60-series. [www.inforplease.com/ipa/0/8/8/3/6/1/A0883617.phtml](http://www.inforplease.com/ipa/0/8/8/3/6/1/A0883617.phtml)

As of 2000 - the latest data available - a male who didn't get through high school had a median annual earning power of about \$25,095, while a high school graduate could expect \$34,303, about \$9000 per year more. Someone with an Associate's degree could add about \$7650 per year to that, bringing his median yearly income up to about \$41,952. The figures for women, unfortunately, are lower, but the effect is the same: more education means more income.

**“When my husband’s business started to fail I went out to work. My first job was working the B-shift in a factory. That was quite an eye-opener for me, to see women who had no choice. Working in a factory was all that they were equipped to do academically. And I thought, this isn’t where I want to be.”**

*Kathleen C. started college in 1971 and finally earned her Bachelor’s degree in the fall of 1998.*

So far, so good. And that difference in earning power at the two-year college level is an excellent reason to officially get your two year, Associate’s degree and go through the graduation line when you are halfway through school. It gives you something that proves you are halfway through. Being able to show that piece of paper is much stronger proof than merely saying “I have 60 credits.”

Back to our example. If an Associate’s degree is worth about \$41,952 for a male and \$31,071 for a female, then what is a Bachelor’s degree worth?

**Bachelor’s degrees are worth more \$\$\$\$!**

And the answer is, more...a lot more.

Males with Bachelor's degrees, on average, bring home \$56,334, a huge \$14,382 per year increase over the two year degree holders. For women the figures are \$40,415 per year for a Bachelor's, a \$9,344 per year advantage over Associate's degree holders. That puts a very high value on that extra two years of school. And for what it's worth, people with Master's degrees do significantly better, as you would expect: about \$68,322 per year for males, \$50,139 for females. And remember that these numbers are medians: half of the sample is above this level, half are below.

**“When this fall comes and I get the job teaching, I'll have something that I've never had in my life, which is benefits. I'll have a steady acceptable paycheck. I've been waiting for 15 years for that.”**

*Patrick A., 46, worked as a waiter for many years before entering college. It took him a bit more than five years to earn his Bachelor's Degree – while working part time.*

If you'd rather work with ratios, here are some from the U.S. Census *Condition of Education, 2000* (see *Section 2: Learner Outcomes: Economic Outcomes and Table 23-2*. The entire report is at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2000/2000062.pdf>). The data is from 1998, the latest available.

Using a ratio of 1.00 as the standard for a high school graduate, a male who didn't finish high school could expect to earn just 0.70 of the pay of a high school graduate. If he had some college, his expected pay was 1.16 that of a high school graduate. And a Bachelor's degree gave him a 1.56 salary advantage over a high school graduate. The numbers for women are even more impressive: 0.69, 1.31 and 2.00. And a word of caution: these ratios are getting wider. Since 1970, the earnings advantage of getting a Bachelor's degree has increased dramatically for both men and women. In that year, the ratios for men were 0.83, 1.09 and 1.24 and 0.59, 1.20 and 1.82 for women. The reverse of this is obviously just as true: people with less education are falling farther behind in the economic sweepstakes.

Looking at actual dollars (year 2000 figures, Current Population Reports, Series P-60), if you are male you can expect a Bachelor's degree to add about \$22,031 per year to your income if you graduated from high school and an additional \$31,239 per year if you didn't finish high school. For females a Bachelor's will add \$15,445 per year for high school grads and \$22,498 per year for those who didn't finish high school.

Over an average working career of about 40 years, this will add up to an extra \$881,240 to \$1,249,560 in your pocket if you're a male, and \$617,800 to \$899,920 in your pocketbook if you're female. Pick up a Master's degree and you effectively double your earning power over a high school education over your working life. Could you use an extra half a million to a million bucks....or maybe twice that with a Master's?

I thought so. If you're interested in the details, check Table II, compliments of the U.S. Bureau of the Census.

**“I think it’s more important that I’m headed toward a career instead of a job. I always saw my other jobs as just jobs, where the only thing I could really offer a company was that I could type really fast.”**

*Ann H., 33, spent more than ten years as a secretary before entering college. She got her Bachelor's degree in May 1998.*

### **And it's not just money**

Although most of us find the extra income from a college education pretty handy, there are a couple of other benefits from going to college. Learning new things, being exposed to new ideas, being able to put new concepts together - all can be pretty exciting once you start doing them. It's amazingly easy to get hooked on learning, and nearly every student I talked with was not going to stop with a Bachelor's degree. Most of them had plans for their Master's, and a couple were shooting for a PhD. This attitude is pretty common. You'll find that once you start learning, you probably won't want to stop.

The final reason to finish that degree doesn't have anything to do with making more money or making you more employable or even the joy of continually learning new things. It has to do with how you feel about yourself.

When you finally stroll down that aisle and cross that stage and that college president hands you that piece of paper, you will feel very, very good about yourself. You will be absolutely, completely ecstatic. I guarantee it.

And something else: you'll be more self-assured, more confident than you've ever been. You'll know that you'll be able to learn and understand anything that you need to know. You'll be able to take on and complete big, complex projects that a lot of your friends would never tackle. You can sit in meetings with your head up and a smile on your face and no one - no one - will be able to successfully challenge your ability to get a big job done.

You already finished the biggest job of your life: you graduated from college as an adult. Everything else is small by comparison.

And PS: Spend the extra few hundred bucks and buy the biggest college ring you can afford and put that coveted sheepskin in the most expensive frame you can find and then hang it for all to see in your living room or right over your dining room table. You earned it.

**“It will definitely improve my life, as well as my kids’ too. Because of the simple fact that I’m in school now, and I’m also on public assistance.”**

*Joyce M., a 36 year old single mother of three, earned her Associate’s and then her Bachelor’s.*