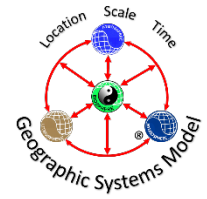




Personal Guide to Go from Learning to Earning

Antidote for the Job Interview Killer Question

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[Applied Geography for Sustainable Living](#)

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Geography may not change the world, but it will change the way you see it.

Introduction: When I first went to school (~4-years old), I had no idea I was supposed to be preparing myself to face the ultimate job interview “killer” question “What kind of experience do you have?”

In the beginning, I went to school because my parents told me I had to go. In middle school, there was the inkling that education would help me get a job. But it was still an abstract idea.

High school sharpened the focus: a good education would get me to university. I was told that a college graduate earned more than a high school graduate. But I wasn't clearly focused on a particular job or field. I got sidetracked by reading the ancient philosophers. I got the idea an education was for enlightenment. I went to college to improve my mind. A job was something I would do to earn money so I could live. The job was not my identity in life. My goal was to be a good decent human being. That meant being honest, helpful, caring and sharing. I could do all those things regardless of what job I got or how much money I earned.

To be honest, I didn't really do much of what I am sharing in this paper. I've been retired for 14 years, and with perfect 20/20 hindsight, I tried to figure out how I got my dream jobs. These were jobs I enjoyed doing (90% of my 35 jobs) AND they paid me to have fun. I loved what I did, I would have done those things without paid. Getting paid was a bonus, not the goal.

Please don't think this is a blueprint to success. You may need to tweak, modify (or even just ignore) parts of it. Much of what I am about to tell you are things that somehow or another “fell into place” for me. I don't claim to know how or why. I'm doing my best to recall these “discoveries.” After all, I am retired (and have been for 14 years now).

I was born and grew up in Hawaii saturated with the “[Aloha Spirit](#).” I had one older brother (2-years ahead of me in school). My parents both worked, Dad during the day, Mom nights and on weekends. Before I started going to school, mom was home most of the time. When I started middle school, mom went to work in the day. Everyone was home at night. I would have to guess we were a lower-middle class family. Both parents bootstrapped themselves out of poverty by hard work.

I was barely a “C” student, and according to my teachers “well-behaved.” I went to college because it was expected of me but mostly to escape from home. I succeeded and never returned except for visits. In college, I was a “C” student until graduate school.



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You can find the story of my journey through school and my working career [here](#). This paper begins with general job options for geography graduates. After that, the items given may be useful to anyone preparing for a job.

For the most part, people don't know what geographers are, let alone what they do. It might go something along the lines of "Oh, you must know all the states and capitols." Or "Oh, a geographer is one who does geography." And then, geography is obviously that which is done by geographers." Of the 35 different jobs I had since leaving college, only the last 2 had the title "Geographer." Even back then, many friends I knew with PhDs were not able to get jobs related to their majors.

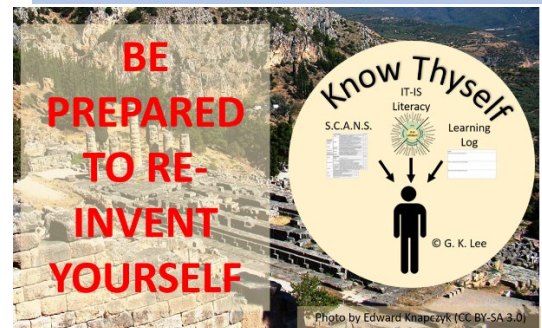
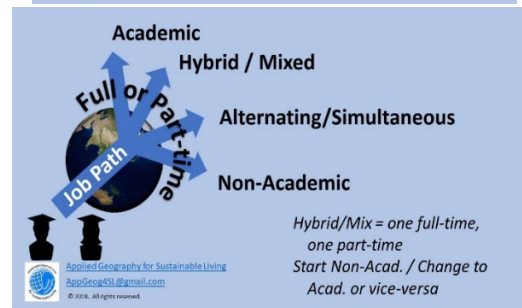
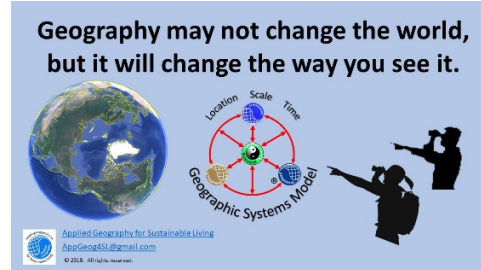
If you've studied geography and earned a degree or not, at some time you need to find a job. COVID has impacted the economy. In times of uncertainty, many businesses cannot afford to hire full-time workers. Even part-time work has been impacted. This report looks at the "old" normal situation as a point of reference. Most of us use past experiences and use them to respond to changes.

The diagram on the right shows the basic four job paths of when I graduated in the 1970s: 1) advance degree holders might try to get a university/teaching job. Going beyond academia is getting into the swamp of invisibility (unless you are in GIS/RS, which didn't exist back then).

The summary table below is a brief compilation of job options based on my personal experiences. The data in the table may not be indicative of the current conditions.

The future is unknown. I've had 35 jobs before retiring. Only the last two jobs had the title "Geographer." I attribute my survival to being flexible about job titles.

Keep it in the back of your mind to be prepared to re-[invent yourself](#) in case of job loss or unexpected life events. It is most important to be on time, on or under budget, and to get the job done well, regardless of your major, degree, or title.



Job Type	Pro	Con	Remarks
Academic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Salary, benefits, tenure possible, if full-time. Part-time more likely but can be very competitive. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Few are available. May not be steady work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Union membership may or may not be required. Tenure is not the same everywhere; see state law.
Hybrid / Mixed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Could be FT Academic, PT other, or vice-versa Could be PT Academic + PT Non-Academic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PT often no benefits. FT/PT could be Independent contractor (see state law). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PT teaching work may require scrambling to line up work for next term. Summer may have opportunities.
Alternating / Simultaneous	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Might start of in Acad. and change to Non-Acad. or vice-versa. Might do both at same time (var. of Hybrid) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If you don't tolerate change well, this may not be viable. Contrast between Acad. / Non-Acad. may be upsetting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flexibility is key to your survival. Finding viable solution sets is more important than finding the right answer.
Non-Academic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can be fast paced and variable. Never a dull moment (or not). May need to be more multi-disciplinary. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hard to find "the right answer." Potential to compromise your principles as money dominates many choices. 	<p>Loyalty and ethics seem to be endangered species as they don't seem to be as highly prized as in the past.</p>

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First Know Thy Self. This is the advice from many ancient philosophers: Know thy self. I suggest this exercise. I don't recall when, where, or from whence this came. But it worked for me. I hope it works for you.

The two images on the right explain the process to get insight to what you truly love to do. Because change is part of life, plan to do this periodically (regularly or as needed).

With this insight to yourself, you have two basic choices. You can study and try to force fit yourself to a job, or you can seek a job that fits your interests. Of course, this assumes you have the freedom to choose and the means to strive for your goal.

Too many people aim for a job and often try to make themselves fit. They study, get a degree, and if lucky get a job matching their major. After working on the job, they find they don't like it.

Information Age Tools. I made this model to guide my students based on what I had to do working in consulting engineering. Regardless of your major, we live in the digital information age. You must identify the Information Technology-Information Systems used in your field. You need to be proficient in using those tools to be productive in your work. You may learn some of these in school. But be aware, schools may or may not be up to par with industry. And be prepared to keep learning as the technology changes. Learning is, after all, a lifelong journey. Get this information from professors, professional societies, working professionals, conferences, workshops, and trade papers.

IT-IS Literacy Model (1 of 2)

Step 1. Put yourself in the center of the model.

Step 2. The gray ring lists 4 general areas of application: Text, Graphics, Tabular & Numeric, Communications & Audiovisual.

Step 3. The next layer out is where you list specific application programs used in your major field of interest. If you don't know, ask working professionals and professors.



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Steps Find Your Dream Job (1 of 2)

Step 1. Imagine you have all the money in the world and never have to work.

Step 2. Fold a sheet of paper (landscape orientation) to make 3 columns.

Step 3. List of all the things you love to do that would keep you from being bored. Write them in column A.

Step 4. Put the paper away and don't look at it for 2 weeks.

A	B	C
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____



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Steps Find Your Dream Job (2 of 2)

Step 5. Label column B "Knowledge" and column C "Skills".

Step 6. For each item in column A, write the corresponding knowledge and skills you enjoy doing related to it.

Step 7. You now have the list of your personal characteristics that define your dream job. Go find a job that requires the knowledge and skill sets you love to do. When you get that job, it won't be work. You'll be paid to do what you love.

A	B	C
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____



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Use the SCANS Checklists. The US Department of Labor conducted a survey of employers, large and small. They asked employers what they expected of new hires. The responses were compiled and clustered into four checklists: Foundation Skills, Thinking Skills, Personal Skills, Workplace Skills.

[Note: The lists are given after this section of text.]

Make use of these checklists. Your tax dollars paid for them. Do not think these checklists are for Vocational/Technical students. Even when you have a PhD, some folks will think you should get a job.

Here are some ways you can use the SCANS checklists to help prepare you for your dream job.

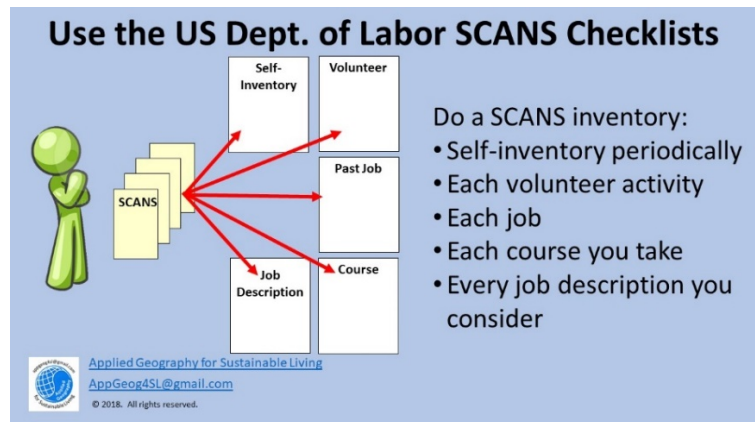


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- 1. Self-Inventory:** Periodically, use the checklists to inventory your current status. You now know where you stand relative to an employer's expectations. This is your baseline. Your goal is to fill in as many of the items as possible. The challenge to effectively using the SCANS checklists is being brutally honest with yourself. One way to do this is to take the role of the employer. Look at each item and ask yourself, "Do I do this so well, I would pay me to do it?" If you can honestly answer "Yes", then check it off.

The idea is to try to check off as many items as you can. There is a saying "If the only tool you have is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail." It makes sense the more tools you have in your toolbox, the better prepared you will be to do your work.



- 2. Volunteer Activities:** Volunteer with a purpose to pave the way to your dream job. This begins with using the SCANS Checklists to volunteer where you can fill in more checklist items. This is a two-step process: Inventory the volunteer activity, then inventory yourself BEFORE and AFTER the event. Contact the volunteer coordinators and tell them you are willing to volunteer IF A) you can do activities related to your needed checklist items, and B) they will give you a written evaluation of your volunteering specifically related to your needed checklist items. This gives you work related documentation for building your resumé.
- 3. Inventory Your Jobs:** Review all your jobs. If possible, do a BEFORE and AFTER inventory. It doesn't matter if they are related to your major or your dream job. Your focus is to inventory job functions as per the SCANS checklist. **[Note:** It is a good idea to keep a file of your past jobs for: starting and ending employment dates and pay rates, job titles, job descriptions, and supervisors. Keep contact with these people via Christmas cards, etc. Some day you may need non-academic references.
- 4. Course Inventories:** Do an inventory BEFORE and AFTER each course you take. This will be a gauge of your academic progress relative to the SCANS items. You will see what new knowledge and skills you are getting from each course you take. You should be checking more items off your list. Use the SCANS checklists to help decide which elective courses you consider taking. Use the checklists to set the scope for your Independent study courses. Strive to check more items off the SCANS checklists with every course you take.
- 5. Job Descriptions:** Do a SCANS inventory of each job posting before you send an application. Use the insight gained to guide your choice of words in writing your resumé. The more often the key words in the job posting appear in your cover letter, resumé, and interview, the more you appear to be a good fit for the job.

For every job you get (and promotion), inventory the job description. The closer the inventory matches your personal SCANS inventory, the more assured you are of meeting the qualifications. On the job, periodic inventories help document when you are going beyond the job description. This supports your request for pay increases or job advancement.

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Foundation Skills		Before	After
A. Reading	1. Locate written information.		
	2. Understand information.		
	3. Interpret information.		
B. Writing	1. Communicate thought in writing.		
	2. Communicate idea in writing.		
	3. Communicate information in writing.		
	4. Create a letter.		
	5. Create directions.		
	6. Create a manual.		
	7. Create a report.		
	8. Create a graph.		
	9. Create a flow chart.		
C. Arithmetic / Mathematics	1. Perform basic computations.		
	2. Approach a practical problem.		
	3. Choose the appropriate mathematical technique.		
D. Listening	1. Receive a verbal message/cue.		
	2. Attend to verbal message/cue.		
	3. Interpret a verbal message/cue.		
	4. Respond to a verbal message/cue.		
E. Speaking	1. Organize ideas.		
	2. Communicate orally.		
Thinking Skills		Before	After
A. Creative Thinking	1. Locate written information.		
B. Decision Making	1. Specify goals and constraints.		
	2. Generate alternatives.		
	3. Consider risks.		
	4. Evaluate alternatives.		
C. Problem Solving	1. Recognizing problems.		
	2. Implement a plan of action.		
D. Seeing Things in the Mind's Eye	1. Mentally organize symbols, pictures, graphs, objects, and other information.		
	2. Mentally process symbols, pictures, graphs, objects, and other information.		
E. Knowing How to Learn	1. Use rules, principles, and underlying relationships between two or more objects.		
	2. Apply rules, principles when solving a problem.		
Personal Skills		Before	After
A. Responsibility	1. Exert a high level of effort.		
	2. Persevere toward goal attainment.		
B. Self-Esteem	1. Believe in own self-worth.		
	2. Maintain positive view of self.		
C. Sociability	1. Demonstrate understanding.		
	2. Demonstrate friendliness.		
	3. Demonstrate adaptability.		
	4. Demonstrate empathy.		
	5. Demonstrate politeness in group settings.		
D. Self-Management	1. Assess self accurately.		
	2. Set personal goals.		
	3. Monitor progress.		
	4. Exhibit self-control.		
E. Integrity/Honesty	1. Choose ethical course of action.		

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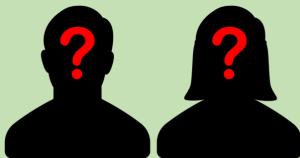
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Workplace Competencies		Before	After
A. Resources	1. Know how to allocate time (e.g., create a time-line chart).		
	2. Know how to allocate money (e.g., estimate costs)		
	3. Know how to allocate materials (e.g., inventory system)		
	4. Know how to allocate space (e.g., organize work area)		
	5. Know how to allocate staff (e.g., job description, work schedule)		
B. Interpersonal Skills	1. Work on a team (e.g., collaborative problem solving)		
	2. Teach others (e.g., train co-workers)		
	3. Serve customers/others (e.g., understand customer needs)		
	4. Lead (e.g., ability to delegate)		
	5. Negotiate (e.g., create negotiating strategies)		
	6. Work with people from culturally diverse backgrounds (e.g., work with an ethnically, age, and gender mixed groups)		
C. Information	1. Acquire data (e.g., create a systematic data collection form).		
	2. Evaluate data (e.g., know how to validate data)		
	3. Organize/maintain files (e.g., develop a filing system)		
	4. Interpret information (e.g., write a report based on data)		
	5. Communicate information (e.g., create presentation)		
	6. Use a computer to process data/information (e.g., use spreadsheet)		
D. Systems	1. Understand social, organizational, technological systems.		
	2. Monitor and correct performance.		
	3. Design and improve systems.		
E. Technology	1. Select equipment and tools (e.g., read specifications to select needed equipment)		
	2. Apply technology to the task (e.g., set up equipment to do a job)		
	3. Maintain and troubleshoot equipment (e.g., read instructions to keep equipment running)		

Source: <https://wdr.doleta.gov/SCANS/whatwork/>

Deciding on a Major: You've done the suggested exercise to find your passion. If you are still undecided, I strongly recommend Geography. Yes, I am biased, that was my major. Geography is inclusive of all life, physical, and social sciences. By majoring in Geography as an undergraduate, you don't close any doors for future graduate studies. Nearly all human activity takes place somewhere on Earth. Any other graduate study takes place somewhere on Earth. Your foundation in geography won't hurt.

Think about resilience to change. The first two years of courses are the core foundation applicable to nearly all majors. For electives, select courses aligned with your passion,

	MAJOR	MINOR
	?	Related to Major
	?	GIS / TEFL

explore new options, or that give you employable practical skill independent of your major. If you start in a community college, consider getting a technical degree / certificate with employable skills. And you can save money as the tuition tends to be lower than four-year schools. **[Note:** You must be careful to consider transferability of your community college courses.] I would suggest Geographic Information Systems (GIS) or Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) for both geographers and non-geographers. There's a good chance these will be employable skills for some time to come.

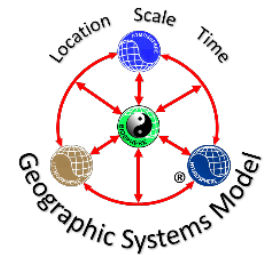
Another consideration is to find a minor which could easily change to become your new major should you change your mind. Careful alignment assures you won't lose credit for courses already taken if you make a shift (e.g., courses in geography and geology may be acceptable in either major).

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Networking: This is an abstract word that is widely spoken and discussed. It is like making new friends, but it can be quite different. For now, keep it professional and not so personal. The following are in order as they came to my mind:

1. **Faculty:** Get to know your professors, their interests, and the professional organizations in which they are members. Do not limit this to your own department and major. Remember, nearly all human activity takes place on Earth. Look at departments with direct connections to your interests, and then include those with indirect connections. Don't forget, professors are people with many facets NOT limited to the label of their job. With networking, you never know who may know someone directly or indirectly connected with your interests. Use the [Geographic Systems Model](#) to help you look for connections. For example, if you are interested in water resources, you are in the Hydrosphere. It can be affected by the Atmosphere, Biosphere, and Lithosphere. You might find interesting connections in those academic fields. It never hurts to ask. The worst that can happen is a negative response. Don't count this as a failure, you've identified a non-path.



2. **Student Memberships:** Most professional groups share the idea of perpetuating the group by encouraging students to join the profession. The steps include discounted student membership fees and offering scholarships. Before joining, attend a local meeting and introduce yourself. Ask if there are folks attending who work in your area of interest. Introduce yourself to them. This is your chance to ask some basic questions:

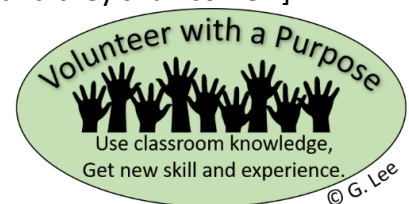


- Why did you choose this profession?
- What did you learn in school that best prepared you for this job?
- What did you need to know to do this job that you didn't learn in school?
- May I please get a copy of your job description and resumé?

[**Note:** If you'd like to talk more, offer to take them to lunch (on you of course). There is no such thing as a "free lunch." You feed them food, they feed you information. Besides, the more successful meetings are predicated on the principle of "Feed them and they shall come."]

3. **Volunteer:** Carefully review volunteer opportunities with an eye to filling gaps in your SCANS inventory. (Review the comments on page 3 of this paper.) Treat each volunteer as a "job" in terms or the recordkeeping suggested in the relative comments on page 3 of this paper. This is how you make more connections in the community. These could lead to

other volunteer activities, internships, and job leads. [**Note:** In high school, many volunteers were from families who could afford to donate and volunteer. These were the "connected ones" to community leaders. I only came to realize this AFTER. My prime reason was helping others. I wasn't aware I was paving the way for my own future.]



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Preparing for the Job Hunt: Here are a few steps you can do well BEFORE graduation.

1. **Career Counseling Resources:** There are a few different things you can do here.

1A) Learn About Yourself: Ask about various tools to learn about yourself (e.g., interest and personality inventories). These can help guide your educational and career plans.

1B) Career Counselors help point the way to “in-demand” majors and careers.

2. **U.S. Dept. of Labor resources:**

2A) [SCANS](#) is a government study of

workplace skills employers expect of employees. [**Note:** This was covered on page 3. Check to see if you have the latest update of the SCANS lists.]

2B) Bureau of Labor Statistics “[Occupational Outlook Handbook](#)” to match their interests/knowledge/skills to the job outlook when you will graduate. There’s no sense studying for a job that may not exist by the time you graduate.

3. **Salary / Benefits / Career Path:** Use online resources to find salaries/benefits for jobs of interest to you in different parts of the country. [**Note:** Don’t just focus on the salary. Benefits can add up to be more than your salary.] Be sure to look at the cost of living for regions of interest. Some sites offer career path timelines (e.g., how long it takes to progress from one level to the next in a career). Be familiar with this information to assess job prospects and offers.

4. **Job Hunting:** For many this begins just before or immediately after graduation. But you should have noticed, this paper points to years of preparation for your job hunt. In addition, you should also be doing homework relative to the overall job market and career field.

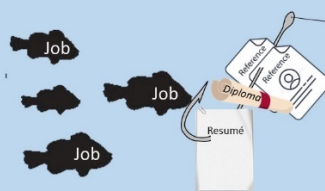
Employment trends vary over time. They are a moving target. If you have an idea of your target, and you know it is moving, you must set your sites to graduate at the “right time” to increase your chances of getting hired. For example, you’ve just started to major in Geography. You read the hot jobs are in Market Research Analysts and decided to focus on that. However, timing is a consideration. If you’ll graduate in 4 years, will the trend continue, or will the “hot” jobs be in another field? The future is always difficult to predict.

5. **Know the Company:** Before you go to an interview, research the company. If possible, get copies of their annual report. Know their products/services, past performance, current activities, and future areas of growth. During the interview, use this information to point out what you can do to help the company reach its goals. Keep in mind, employers expect you to arrive ready to work. It might seem obvious, but be sure you are able to get to work on time. This means having



Job Hunting Can Feel More Like Fishing

You do your best to get fresh bait (your diploma, resumé, and letters of reference). You put them on your hook (i.e. cover letter or application). Then you sit back and wait for some nibbles.



Some people end up cutting a lot of bait. Some drown a lot of bait. Others get nibbles and find their hook empty. Good bait and luck and some folks land a job.

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reliable transportation. Have alternate plans in case your normal way to work is disrupted.

6. **After the Interview:** Immediately after the interview, send a written “Thank You” to the interviewer. (You should have their contact information from prior correspondence.) If you get a form rejection letter, don’t take it as a failure. Send a written reply, thanking them for the opportunity to interview and ask for suggestions for improvement. It doesn’t hurt to ask if they know of other opportunities in the company or in other companies. You never know. They may have gotten a good impression of you. While there may not be opportunities in their company, they have contacts in the industry. It’s all part of networking.

Closing Remarks: My biggest complaint about life is no one gets out of it alive. You only have one life to live. The basic choice is to live your life, or to let others live it for you.

School conditions us to think about getting the “right” answers. In life, there aren’t many “right” answers. Changes come at you all the time. That means what seemed “right” then, may not be so when conditions change. You either resist, adapt, or move away.

They say all the world’s an oyster. I don’t know how true that is, but if it were, mine had a globe in it, and it has been a real gem for me. Best wishes in the pursuit of your dream job. I got mine, and it made my life very enjoyable. 🌐

