Peter

28:23

Interviewer: OK, so, everything is going to be confidential and coded. Peter, honey, tell me about the undergraduate experience. OK, here's the question, the undergraduate experience, graduation, and degree completion are what's called scheduled events. And these are considered the rites of passage. So scheduled events are things that were supposed to happen. How do you feel about your transition from school to work and then share with me about events and non-events that you anticipated would occur once graduated or didn't occur. So part one of the question is tell me about your transition from school to work.

Peter: So once I actually got the degree, we were in a recession. So that transition for me was extremely hard. It took me a year and a half to find a decent job. I struggled between whether or not I was going to go back to grad school immediately or if I was going to wait, etc. So it just wasn't the best transition. It took a year and a half to find a position. So my expectations, having a degree from Midwest University, was to get a job in the field that I went to school for, which is health care. I got a position in marketing. And still haven't. I still haven't gotten a position in health care. I do realize at this point I'm going to have to go back to grad school. I just got accepted to the University of Detroit Mercy. So yeah that was my expectation. Part of the question was….

Peter 1 March 10, 2014

Interviewer: So what are some things you would have thought would have occurred for you because of this degree?

Peter: Yeah, well yeah I thought I would have been able to get a position as a health care analyst even working for Midwest University Hospital. And I wasn't able to do that. I tried several times. It didn't happen. And even now I'm actually unemployed now. So yeah, it definitely wasn't, hasn't been the best experience for me.

Interviewer: Were there any things that did happen because you're a Michigan grad?

Peter: That did happen? Well, originally I was accepted into school, but I would say immediately afterwards, the job that I did get was through the Career Development Office. So I would say that the job that, as I said, the job that I did get was given to me…. I think that was part of the reason why I got the job was because I was a Midwest University graduate. The system has completely changed. You at least need a college degree to get a *decent* job nowadays. So I think that, as I said, I think that helped, but I wasn't getting, it wasn't like a glamorous position, it was a sales position, so yeah.

Interviewer: OK, let's take a look, question #2, as you transitioned from school to work, what social support and strategies for navigating life after college did you find particularly helpful?

Peter: Well, creating my own network. The network here at Midwest University, the

Comprehensive Studies Program, definitely helped. Just by talking to some of the administrators here such as yourself and Dr. Fontenot, Dr. Dwight Fontenot,

he definitely helped me to learn about different contacts, opportunities, strategies for how to find a job, grad school recommendations. Those type of things definitely, definitely helped socially. I joined, I tell you, joining Kappa Alpha Psi, which is a social fraternity, that helped somewhat. But I think the strongest network for me was definitely, has definitely been the Comprehensive Studies Program here at Midwest University.

Interviewer: OK, awesome. Let's see here, in terms of social support and strategies, has there been anything particularly challenging?

Peter: Uh, yes, I think the competition. You know, once you implement the strategy, you plan your strategies…. So, for instance, if I applied for a job, what I would do is, not only would I go online and apply for the job, I would also go into the actual office to submit a hard copy of my professional portfolio. So I would do that but then after that it's pretty much, it's all about the competition. It's all about how you present yourself. And it's just been challenging actually. The biggest challenge is waiting, waiting to find out whether or not companies are going to move forward with you or not. And I just think that's ridiculous because of the competition. They want to make sure that they have, they're matching the right person for the position. And because in this economy, they have jobs that they're not, that don't match their skill set. So and I think that's a huge problem with our economy now. You're giving people jobs that it's not necessarily about them not deserving it, they're just not trained for it. So yeah, so I think that's probably been the biggest challenge, waiting, just waiting. It's almost like I'm getting older and older as the years

go by, and I just want to be in a position where I'm going to be

able to make an impact, to be able to help. And I'm, it can sometimes, it's been discouraging having to wait.

Interviewer: And what strategies do you use, are they different when you're, you know, in terms of waiting and then when that discouragement, I know you said this office is particularly very supportive, are there other strategies that you use for the discouragement? And in your desire to make a difference and you see it as a nonevent technically. So how do you cope with that?

Peter: I have a strong spiritual network, strong spiritual support, my church. I belong to Harvest Mission Community Church. And just having that relationship, having a strong relationship with God spiritually and the people in my church, it helps. It helps to be able to talk to people who who….A lot of people can relate to me. A lot of them are in the same position. So it lets me know that I'm not alone. And then also I exercise a lot. I exercise. I love to run. It actually helps relieve stress, and yeah, those are the main ways that I cope with that discouragement. And I kind of use that discouragement as motivation. It kind of helps to add fuel. It kind of helps to, it helps me, it's almost like I'm turning the discouragement into motivation. So those are the things that I do.

Interviewer: Awesome. Awesome. [J: Thank you.] OK, the undergrad years provide an opportunity to explore learning in and out of the classroom. To what degree did the academic and also the social college experience prepare you to find gainful employment? So let's look at the academic side first in terms of preparing you for finding gainful employment. What are your

thoughts about that?

Peter 4 March 10, 2014

Peter: I think the academic experience itself, like the way that the university makes you, the system makes you, think for yourself, basically it teaches you how to think in the real world. The classes themselves haven't been that helpful. Because it's just, it's completely different. You gain a lot of knowledge, but the knowledge that's needed in the positions that I've held in terms of employment, they don't directly correlate. So what does correlate is the thought process, the mentality of having to prioritize, knowing which course, which assignment, is more important than the next, which class is more important. Because a lot of times you fall behind in one class when you or you're actually…. I'm sorry it's almost the opposite. You're excelling in one class when you really need to be excelling in a different course. So if you're in the work force, you have to prioritize what you do on a daily basis. So, for example, on my last job, when I went to work, or almost on every job, what I do is I create a list of things I have to do throughout the day. Not only that, I try to be the first one in, first one out. I create the list, I mean *last* one out. But I create a list, and as I go throughout the day, I check off what I need to do in terms of priority. And I did that with my classes as well. So if that makes any sense. [I: Sure, sure]That's how the academia of Midwest University has directly correlated with my employment. What was the other part of the question?

Interviewer: The other part is social. There's a lot of social college experiences. So how did that prepare…?

Peter: So the networking. Having to be professional among, even among your peers sometimes in college, has helped out a great deal. For instance, like when you're out in the real world and

you're working, you have an employer. Well, when you

go to class, you have a professor that you have to report to. So it's almost like the same correlation. You have to be professional, respectful, and handle yourself in a manner that will allow you to sustain your position and to communicate effectively. So that's definitely, that's helped out, created the network, as I said—the Comprehensive Studies Program. A lot of the administrators and staff here, just being able to communicate and getting that help. You have to do the same thing at work. If you want to do your job effectively, if you want to excel and graduate from school, if you want to get to that next promotion/position out in the work force, you have to communicate effectively.

Interviewer: Good, good. Oh let's see. Now this one positions us to take a look at, you know, in the connection of the job market and the economy. Originally when we designed this question we thought, wow, young people would not be impacted by the job market or the economy. And the reason we thought that is you, you know, we said well, they really have no prior history of work and needing to position themselves that way. But this transition is defined as a turning point between two periods. When you look at your path from school to work in the context of the job market and the economy, how do your roles now fit short- and long-term with your career aspirations?

Peter: Can you ask that question again?

Interviewer: OK, so again we're looking at the job market and the current economy. And we're looking at your short-term and long-term career aspirations. Is there a correlation?

Because we kind of figured that you guys weren't professionals to begin with

prior to entering the market. So is there a correlation in terms of short- and long-term career aspirations?

Peter: Yes and no. Long term, there's so much uncertainty in the work force right now. It's like you have to, in order to have longevity or to have like a long-term position professionally, you have to learn how to, it's almost like create your own brand. Like you have to learn how to re-create yourself within this economy whether you have a position or you don't, if that makes sense. You have to know how to appeal to whatever position it is that you, whatever industry you're working in so that you can have a long-term, so you can have a career long term. Short-term. Sorry, I want to make sure that I answered your question in terms of long term.

Interviewer: OK, for example, your goal after graduation was to become a health analyst and you acquired which one of our degrees?

Peter: Psychology.

Interviewer: OK, sure. So you enter the market with a psychology degree, in terms of being this health analyst. [J: Right] To what degree do you think maybe the job market and the current labor market affected those short-term goals and your long-term goals? I mean are you done with this goal to be an analyst?

Peter: Well, no, no. So I'm not, so I've kind of, as I've said, you have to like re-create yourself. So once I start classes at University of Detroit, Mercy, I'll be going for a Master's in Health

Services Administration. So from there I haven't quite determined what I want to do. I'm thinking about anything from starting a non

profit to going into management, meaning learning how to help run a hospital. So the analyst part of it was actually I wanted to work full time and then go to school part time. So that was just, it was almost kind of like a stepping stone. So the short term of that, yes if I can still get a position as an analyst, then yes I'll take that. That would actually be the short-term component of…..

Interviewer: Your long term?

Peter: My long term, right. So the long term is being, putting myself in a position to either run a nonprofit or to help manage a hospital.

Interviewer: So tell me this, at what point…

Peter: And in terms of the economy, as I said before, like the competition is just stiff. I think the economy is getting better. Living in Michigan is actually worse than it is in some other states in terms of actually getting a position as a health care analyst. And then also or just getting jobs in general. So that definitely affects the short term and the long term.

Interviewer: So at what point do you realize your psychology degree is not going to garner you what you had expected?

Peter: Uh, well, I realized that as soon as graduated, as soon as I got into the work force and I realized I couldn't get a position in health care. So to answer that question, yeah. I knew that I

eventually, if I couldn't make it in the industry that I was in, in terms of marketing, I knew there was only a certain amount of time. I had a plan set. I figured after about two years I would apply for grad school.

Peter 8 March 10, 2014
Interviewer: So for you that two years has now passed and…

Peter: It's been over two years.

Interviewer: Oh has it?

Peter: Yeah.

Interviewer: Wow. Yeah, so and it sounds like you have the good support and coping, because would you say, I mean how, what was your response when you realized like wow, I graduated from Michigan, I got a Psychology degree and fill in the blanks.

Peter: It was discouraging at times. Like knowing, when I first got the degree I felt great. It was like, "OK, finally, I have my degree after taking time off of school and coming back." I'm actually a nontraditional graduate. And coming back to school and graduating, I felt great. I felt like I, I can get whatever job I wanted to get. Didn't happen. So it was discouraging amongst…there were other factors as well personally but just in terms of the economy, etc., it was just, it was definitely discouraging. And I've tried to be as creative as possible. So it, I think it's getting better though.

Interviewer: So let's see. Is there anything specifically that we can do to improve the transition from school to work for today's millennial graduates?

Peter: Yes. I think that, I think there needs, what the, you mean as the Comprehensive Studies Program?

Interviewer: No, in general.

Peter 9 March 10, 2014
Peter: The university?

Interviewer: Yeah, absolutely.

Peter: Oh yeah the university….

Interviewer: The school to transition process could be multilayered. How do you see it?

Peter: Yes, I think that there needs to be more of a focus, like while students are in school, I think that, especially coming from the inner city, coming from Detroit, coming into a prestigious university like this, the transition is to-, it's difficult. Because you're coming into a place where everyone is smart. Everyone knows, and a lot of people know more about how to study and how to maneuver in this school than other people do. So what I'm speaking about it is the dominant social culture, the dominant social group, they know, their educational background is better than minorities, a lot of minorities coming from the inner city where you don't have as much resources. And you don't really know how to study. I think that there could be, I don't know, like a course on how to study, learning how to study. As I said, when you come to University of Midwest, you have to, it's almost like you have to figure things out for yourself. I'm not saying that the university should treat us like babies or anything like that. But in a way it's like, it's just a completely new environment so there should be a process, more of a nurturing process, meaning, you know, where when you enter, you have a group of young minds who don't really

know, don't really know anything. That's why we're coming to college to learn. And I think that if we had that, maybe a course on learning how to study, learning how to prioritize your time management, etc.,

if we had those type of courses leading up to Job Fairs, leading up to matching the skill sets that we've learned here at Midwest University with the right jobs, then there won't be, it wouldn't be so much of a, so much of a problem with finding the jobs that are available. Because I think a lot of, where a lot of students go wrong is, they, you know, they feel like they can get a degree or get a job anywhere with any degree that they receive from Midwest University. So if you receive a degree in Psychology, I felt, I felt like I could go and get a job just about anywhere—at a bank, a hospital, etc. So actually I took the first position that became available to me. And had I had a little bit more guidance in terms of learning how to study, first, learning how to study. If you learn how to study effectively, then you'll be able to focus more on the concentration on what you went to school for, on the concentration that you're studying for in school, which will, like I said, will help you transition into that specific to that actual position that you want. If that makes sense.

Interviewer: It makes great sense. I'm hearing, you know, in terms of application. There is, for me, as a researcher, I see your point as a disconnect, right? You come here to study a concentration [J: Right], but if I'm making sense of your words and feel free to correct me [J: Sure], because my goal is to understand how to make sense to you, is sure, there's a set of skills needed to achieve a degree [J: Right], but create a course to show me how those same skills can

help me get a job.

Peter: Yes, exactly right. A course that teaches me how to get a job, right, basically, right. That's correct.

Interviewer: And what's interesting is, so the Career Services were they useful at all? When did you start using them? In the freshman, sophomore, junior year?

Peter: I started using them before I graduated. I started using them like my junior/senior year of college. Just going over. I networked with some administrators in the Business School learning how to create a, you know, the proper resume. I did the same thing with the Career Services Department. Because they, they weren't as effective. They did have, they do have templates

Interviewer: "They" is who?

Peter: Meaning the Career Development Office over in the SAB, the Student Activities Building. It wasn't as effective as going…. It's kind of like you've got to kind of move around to get like a well-packaged portfolio to present to employers as opposed to just going to the Career Development Services Department, which should be the only place you should have to go. That's how I feel. Because you are, that place as well as the school that you're in. So if I'm in the school of L,S, and A, I'm going to come to the Comprehensive Studies Program to talk to my academic adviser, and then from there getting that help, which I do think was effective going to Dr. Fontenot, but then going over to the Career Development Department, which is where you're supposed to actually go have these interviews set up for you right here at the school. I didn't

have one interview here at Midwest University. And I applied for hundreds of jobs *before* I graduated, *before* I graduated. We're talking about the last say from the last, the last semester of school. And I'm doing this on top of school work. So while they did

recommend a position for me and I did eventually get a position through them, I never got a chance to have an interview, what's it's called? An on-spot interview in the Career Development Office. Whereas there were a lot of other students who were able to get those interviews. So I don't know. I just think that it could be more of an effective strategy coming from the Career Services Department.

Interviewer: Yeah, and you know, and honestly, and I hear similar stories. So you almost wonder what criteria allows certain people to get these interviews? Because I think you're among the population I've also talked to and they say, "Yeah, that wasn't my story."

Peter: [Laughs] Right, right.

Interviewer: So someone like me who's interested in different populations and how they experience that same experience, you're like, "Well, dang, what's the criteria?"

Peter: Right, yeah, because when you come out of here, you have to, you want to try to get a good job, either that or go back to school, whichever way it is. My mission was to get a job at the time. Because as soon as you come out, you have loans to pay back. I mean well, three years that you can defer your loans up to three years. But you still have to put together a plan that will help you pay back the money

that's owed. Because an education here is not cheap. It's very expensive and it can definitely, it definitely has an impact on you financially just coming straight out, straight out of graduation. So I just feel like there should…. I don't care what degree you have from University of Midwest, it's going to be expensive, right?

Therefore, there should be a job waiting for you to help you pay for that degree. And it's just, that's not a reality for a lot of graduates, especially minorities.

Interviewer: Wow, and that's good to know, because it's almost like, wow…there's a vacuum here. How do we fix it?

Peter: Yeah, absolutely.

Interviewer: So yeah, hopefully I can come up with some answers. [Recording 2 ends] Peter 14

March 10, 2014