

The summertime job blues—two views

Job searching with no previous experience proves a Catch-22

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The school year finally has come to an end, an end to which most students have been looking forward since August. It's time to look for that perfect summer job!

This summer, I am finally 16 and able to work. Unfortunately, many others are also eligible to work this summer, and the search for a job by an unemployed, inexperienced teen can really become a hopeless mission if one is looking for decent pay.

Although minimum wage in Illinois increased from \$5.15 to \$6.50 as of Jan. 1 this year, it is natural that many teenagers would still want more than the minimum wage or at least pleasant working conditions. Perhaps the most frequent employers of teens, fast food restaurants, offer neither, paying minimum wage to deal with greasy fries and high-pressure service and fast-paced drive-thrus.

Those employers who offer higher wages and nicer environments are reluctant to hire teens for one often arbitrary reason: a lack of experience. A case in point: When I went for an interview at the Mario Tricocci Salon at Old Orchard, the hiring manager was very pleased with my attitude, not to mention that I was recommended by one of the veteran employees and that my interview went almost perfectly.

The only flaw? She realized about halfway into the interview that I had never had a job before. She did not react very discreetly, making a very unpleasant face. She then tried to pretend as if it didn't matter and said that she would call me if she needed me. So much for that position. I mean, how difficult could it be to assort nail polish by colors and be hospitable to customers? Is it really necessary to have previous job experience to offer people coffee?

In addition to the level of difficulty securing a job with decent pay, many of the decent-paying jobs are often very dangerous. Jobs in the field of construction or transportation—such as delivery trucks, cars or bicycles—are sometimes just an accident waiting to happen.

If that isn't bad enough, I have discovered that some teens are paid "under the table," meaning that they are paid less than minimum wage in cash to avoid paying taxes, an agreement between employer and employee that, while illegal, benefits both. However, this can also cause a problem for many who may have dispute with their employers and/or who may get unexplained deductions from their paychecks with no option but to accept them.

Furthermore, it might not be wise to include such a position on one's resume, regardless of how much experience or knowledge one might have acquired.

Meanwhile, prospective employees just getting out of school for the summer fight for the few scraps available to us.



Employers should show compassion for first-timers

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The summer season has arrived, and I find myself with a lot of extra time on my hands. With a mother who is constantly nagging me to occupy my time with something productive, a summer job seemed like the only alternative to summer school.

The options were endless: camp counseling, lifeguarding, restaurant hostessing or even cashiering at my favorite store in the shopping mall. The idea of

earning lots of money to spend and pleasing my parents at the same time seemed like a definite win-win situation.

Getting down to the nitty-gritty, I began the chase for a perfect job. On every errand I ran with my mom, I found myself picking up an application, going home, filling it out and returning it with a smile on my face—in one of my best outfits. Occasionally, I'd be asked to complete a 30-page personality survey, the next step closer to being accepted for a position.

Since this is the first time I've tried to get a job, I had no idea of the ordeal to which I would be subjected. Filling out tedious applications about me, myself, and I has become a dreaded task. From Nordstrom to the Skokie Park District, I haven't even received a single callback for an interview. I comb my hair, I brush my teeth, I put on make-up, and I even have my mom check my application for grammatical errors. Why is it so hard for a 16-year-old to get a simple summer job?

Granted, I started my search a week after spring break, while everyone else seemed to have their summers already planned, but should that have penalized me?

In my search I've come to realize that managers and supervisors prefer to hire reliable persons with some kind of experience. They don't want to have to put up with some irresponsible teenager who will ultimately do nothing but drive customers away and waste their time. I understand this.

Nevertheless, employers could give us first-time applicants a small break. Those of us we've never been through an interview before don't know how to answer questions so quickly, and the seemingly limitless surveys are extremely confusing. A little help and compassion wouldn't kill them.

Maybe I have missed my opportunity to make a fortune of my own for this summer season, but I still have a couple months left to stalk any opportunity at a job that is worth pursuing.

As of now, my next attempt in the real world is at the new Pro Golf store in Village Crossing. I have filled out the application to the best of my abilities, and although I know absolutely nothing about golf, maybe they'll like me this time. Fore!