

WHAT I WISH *i would've known*



Faucon



Benoit

by Kristine Penning, AgCareers.com Creative Marketing Specialist

THERE'S NO DOUBT that there are things you'll look back on in your life and wish you would have done differently. This is certainly true of your career journey. While there is definitely value in learning lessons on your own as you experience the working world for the first time, it also doesn't hurt to gain perspective and advice from those who have started their journeys before you.

We reached out to two young professionals with a few years in the working world under their belts to find out what they would and wouldn't change if they could go back. Kristen Faucon works as an Issues Manager with GROWMARK, Inc. in Bloomington, Illinois, having graduated from Illinois State University in 2015. In her role, she communicates with policy makers and regulators on behalf of GROWMARK. Lauren Benoit, a native of Ontario and a graduate of the University of Guelph, is now employed as a Field Biologist with BASF in Tamworth, Australia.

If you could go back to your senior year of college and give yourself a piece of advice about working in "the real world", what would you tell yourself?

KRISTEN: Don't feel like you must have your career path all figured out, because it will change. Opportunities will come your way at unexpected times and the experiences you have will change your perspective.

LAUREN: Look for opportunities that might seem a little outside of your comfort zone. This could be applying for a new position, learning a new skill, or moving somewhere unexpected for work. Although creating a habit of taking on new challenges, learning new skills, and being open to new ideas can be difficult, you'll see a benefit from it in the long run.

What do you think post-secondary students often get wrong about entering the workforce today?

KRISTEN: I think we often expect to be CEO tomorrow. We have our degree and we have done all this great work in college, so we should start closer to the top of the ladder (with a huge paycheck) and continue to rise quickly. I think we could all stand to be a little more humble. I'm not advocating for complacency, but rather being honest about the work it's going to take to prove yourself and rise to the top. You're essentially going from the top of the totem pole as a senior in college back to the very bottom in the workforce. That's a hard adjustment and one I'll admit I have struggled with.

LAUREN: The first job you get after graduation might be the start of a long and successful career in a specific part of the industry, or with a single company; or it might just be a stepping stone onto other opportunities as you learn more about what you are passionate about and where you would like your career to go. If

your first job isn't the dream job you were hoping for, that's alright. Embrace it for what it is and keep putting in your best effort. When the time is right and a new opportunity presents itself you'll be able to move on to something you're more passionate about.

What advice would you give to a newly graduated young professional about working with older generations?

KRISTEN: Like building any relationship, you have to find common interests and learn how that person communicates. Respect their experience and the knowledge they have and tap into it. There's so much you can learn, and they want to share that with you. You just have to ask. But don't get sucked into how things have always been done. You are going to bring a fresh perspective to a process or issue and that may be the right approach, but it's about implementing it in a respectful way.

LAUREN: Respect is reciprocal, and learning can be mutual. This doesn't just apply to the older generations but all your new co-workers and peers. Everyone brings a different skill set to the table. Working with someone from an older generation is a chance to gain the tips and tricks of the trade from someone who has been there. Likewise, as a young graduate you'll bring fresh perspective to the team. Don't be scared to voice your ideas or ask questions. >>>

Do you think your expectations met your reality about working in “the real world”? Why or why not?

KRISTEN: My internship experiences in college helped prepare me for the real world. I think I expected group work to go a lot better than it does in college. I had this wrong assumption that if everyone at the table was getting a paycheck to be there, that they would all equally contribute. Unfortunately, I am here to tell you that project teams at work can be just as bad as project teams in college. I have learned a lot about project management and leading teams where I am not the most senior individual but still have to command deliverables from those who are.

LAUREN: After finishing my MSc. I moved to Australia to begin working for BASF as a field biologist. I didn't really know what to expect. My new role has had its fair share of challenges, adapting to a new environment and cropping system on top of being away from friends and family. The role itself is very similar to work I did as an undergraduate student, though.

What are some things you wish you would have done to prepare for the career you are in now that you didn't do in college?

KRISTEN: This sounds silly, but I wish I would have taken golf lessons. So much networking occurs on the golf course and I feel like I miss out on those opportunities to build relationships. Of course, it's not too late to learn and it's a skill I plan to work on in the next year.

LAUREN: Looking back, I wish I had made better connections with some of my professors and taken the time to learn more about their work. They are

there to help you learn, but they're also a wealth of information and are often working on cutting-edge research. I wish I had taken the time to understand what they were studying while I was a student.

What are some lessons you've had to learn the hard way about working in “the real world”?

KRISTEN: I think the hardest lesson I have had to learn is work-life balance. You're not only new to this, but it is very easy to work long hours because you're young and wanting to prove yourself. However, being that hard on yourself

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mentally and physically will catch up with you. No one else can manage that for you and you must learn your own boundaries. If you are stressed and run down, you're not your best self at work and you won't have the energy for things that you love. Over time you will figure out what opportunities to embrace and which to turn down, as well as how to manage getting things done around those hours required at work.

LAUREN: Mental and physical health is important, and burnout is a very real thing. Slow down. Make time for yourself and find a way to de-stress. For me, this was my first semester of grad school, between taking on graduate level courses and meshing into a different social environment. I burned out. Fast. In

the end, I learned more about my limits and now have a better understanding of how to take care of myself when it feels like the pressure is being turned up. Now, I make sure to set aside some time every week or two to have a phone call and catch up with friends as well as maintaining a pretty regular weekly running routine to stay in shape and burn off any extra stress.

What is something you recommend new graduates do today to stand out in the working world?

KRISTEN: Go out of your way to learn more about the company you are working for, and don't be afraid to ask higher level managers. When I started my first job, I took the opportunity to seek out job shadow experiences with individuals from various departments. I would simply reach out and ask if I could have twenty minutes of their time to learn more about what they do. Those twenty minutes often turned into an hour or a day of experiences. One notable experience was riding with a vice president for a day of merger meetings – few people get that kind of opportunity. I was able to learn a lot about the business and I got noticed because I was genuinely interested in learning and I wasn't afraid to ask.

LAUREN: Do your best, ask questions, and reach out to your network if you're looking for advice. People will see if you're driven to do a good job and putting in an honest effort to be the best version of yourself. Don't worry about bench-marking yourself against where you think you should be or where your friends are. If you're looking for advice don't hesitate to ask someone who is there already, most people are happy to offer their insight. **AG**