

Did you consider any other careers? How did you choose?



My experience with other parts of the world is limited, but it seems that we Americans are more focused on our careers than others. Our profession, and our success in that profession, is a significant component of our self-image and sense of worth. It has been for much of my life.

When people ask my advice, I tell them to explore their interests and follow their dreams, but hold those dreams lightly. Identify your vision, the sunrise over the mountaintop, that place you want to be someday. Describe what that place—actually or metaphorically—looks like. Think of the details, and imagine the wonders you will see. At the same time, remember that circumstances will change. Your vision will guide you toward that mountain, but as you get closer, you may see that your

Jesse Hulse

mountain is the next one or the one off to the side. Your dreaming and planning will not have been for naught, they guided you to a place from which you can see further and in more detail. I encourage you to live with your dreams in view, but be willing to modify them.

In grade school, there were lots of dreams, and they changed as they swirled around inside my head. My love of football knew no bounds for a short time. In the mid-1960s, I heard the song “The Ballad of the Green Berets,” and my dreams of prowess on the gridiron were soon eclipsed by my mental image of a fierce and fearless commando.

Science always intrigued me, and that began to guide most of my dreams. One day in a Sunday School class, the teacher asked what we wanted to be when we grew up. My hand went up. “I want to be a Christian scientist.” In my mind, it was the perfect answer.

The teacher looked puzzled for a moment. “You mean a scientist who is a Christian?”

Then I looked puzzled at her. “Yes, isn’t that what I said?”

In my second year of high school, we spent a week or so learning about various careers. We took tests to identify fields that might interest us. With no big surprise, mine were in science. Then we

Jesse Hulse

looked over lists of careers focusing on fields we had identified and read more about those that piqued our interest. This was all done in our homeroom class, and for me, that was science and Mr. Boss. My interests may have been in science, but my inclination was to avoid schoolwork. While reading about a career in chemical engineering, I heard Mr. Boss chuckling behind me. He said, “Things like chemical engineering are for the top ten percent. You need to look at things like auto mechanics; things you’re capable of.”

Before you judge Mr. Boss too harshly, my grades in his biology class that year were not stellar. Each term, the final exam counted for one-third of the final grade, and just before the exam, I would start studying. My score on the final exam each term was the second highest in the class—I never could beat Dave Ratzlaff, who ironically did become a mechanic (you need brains to work on cars)—which brought my grade up to a “C”.

I met Mr. Boss a few years ago and did enjoy telling him about the incident over forty years earlier. I was gracious, but there may have been a little tartness in my words when I said, “I didn’t become a chemical engineer, my degree was in biology, but I did hire, train, and manage several of them.”

By my last year of High School, my mind decided it was medical school for me. My priorities were people and science, how better

Jesse Hulse

to combine the two than as a doctor? For the first time in my life, studying was a priority. My grades that year were just short of the elusive 4.0, and my grade point average climbed enough for me to graduate with honors.

On my way to my dream, I studied chemistry, physics, and biology, and even though I found time for music and philosophy, but my target was always medical school.

After three years of applications and three years of rejections, I had to reconsider my dream. In a meeting with the registrar of Oregon Health Sciences University, I was told, “You’re a realistic applicant. There’s no question about whether you could make it. We just have so many applicants that most people are turned away.”

My dreams had not been held lightly, and they had been shattered. However, with a wife and son to care for, my next few months were spent working in a farm co-op. Then there was a stint in construction until the housing industry went through a slump. Janitorial work kept food on the table for a few years, but running my own business taught me that entrepreneurial pursuits were not in my wheelhouse. My company never got off the ground.

While working with a friend on a small remodeling job, a call came for me. A recruiter had taken the time chase to me down at

Jesse Hulse

the job site. At that time, my job searches had included McDonald's. They wouldn't interview me because I had a college degree. Ore-Ida foods advertised a job in their test kitchen. Even with a science degree, there was no reply to my application. However, a recruiter at Genentech asked if I was interested in a job. Genentech was the first biotech company, and in the early 1980s, people across the globe were clamoring to work there.

A few months earlier when talking to our pastor, I told him my frustrations. My background was in chemistry and biology, but that seemed to qualify me for nothing but graduate school. He told me his brother-in-law was a biochemist and might know where I could look for a job. After sending a resume and hearing nothing, it was just another dead end. But, now, Genentech—the brother-in-law's employer—was sending me a plane ticket to travel from Portland to San Francisco for an interview. A month later Vanda's parents came to take her and our three small boys to stay with them in Eastern Oregon, while I drove our old Ford Falcon van south to find a place to live.

Five years later, another recruiter was looking to fill an opening in a North Carolina company. This time, the company hired movers to relocate our family to Sanford, NC. Adjusting to a new company, training on new technology, and adapting to a new culture was a challenge, but it was a welcome challenge. All went well until I became a project manager. It seemed like such a good

move, but project management is about planning and details, neither of which are high on my list of talents.

After eight years in North Carolina, there was another recruiter, another company, and another move. Our family adjusted well to Southern California and Amgen, the new company. My job was no longer manufacturing, but quality assurance, managing a team that ensured all product was in conformance before final processing. This company seemed to be a perfect fit for my personality, and it was—until it wasn't. After a couple of years, I was asked to be a project manager, and it was a bit of a disaster.

A larger group of project managers was formed, and it was decided they needed someone who could work with groups to expedite their progress. My boss said, "We need a facilitator. Go do that." With those words as my only guidance and training, she left for a three-week vacation. It was the most exhilarating time of my career. A visit to the space planning department yielded a secluded conference room with a couple of offices. With a little organization and the addition of a sound system, the place was ready, and I started holding workshops for groups of people throughout the company.

You might think that jumping into that kind of job with no training would be cataclysmic, but my lack of preconceived ideas freed me up to find new innovative ways to get people working

together. At the end of each workshop, people were asked to complete a survey to measure its effectiveness on a scale of 1 to 10. After more than eighty workshops over about three years, hundreds of people rated the workshops with an average score of 9 out of 10.

The problem—there always seems to be a problem—was that while the people participating in the workshops were overjoyed at their value, upper management was convinced they were a waste of time. Two different bosses shut my facility down, but both of them reopened it within a few days because of complaints from across the company. Finally, I was fired and escorted to my car. So ended my biotech career.

With my success in facilitation, I started Giffordson Solutions. I planned to work as a facilitator, and I did, but without any real business training, and with no skills in marketing, the jobs were few and far between. There were some consulting jobs here and there, but too few to live on.

While on one consulting job, I created an interactive web-based system to manage franchises. Over the next few years, the system grew and developed. With good business skills, it could probably have been lucrative, but we both know my record in that arena. The system is still operating in one franchise and does bring in a small sum each month.

Jesse Hulse

While looking for business contacts I joined a Toastmasters club, and through that, I was asked to teach public speaking for a large homeschool group. That led to teaching in a charter school as well. All of that ended in 2020 with Covid, but it was a great experience.

If a career is limited to only what brings in money, mine has had some high points and some lows—we're talking Death Valley lows. However, I've learned (all too slowly) that my professional life is only one part of my career and not the most important part. Much of my time these days is spent as a youth leader in my local church. I meet with junior high students a couple of times a week, and sometimes with the high school kids. People sometimes wonder why I spend time with young people, and I tell them, "When I worked in the biotech industry, I got a certain satisfaction. People would complement me on solving a problem or running a meeting, and that felt good. I don't have that anymore. Instead, I walk into a room and junior high and high schools kids run up to hug me. Guess which I like the most."

The title of this little essay posed two questions that I will now answer directly and simply: "Did you consider any other careers?" Oh yes, I considered many, many other careers. "How did you choose?" I followed the path in front of my feet and walked on to adventure.