

Chapter 1

The big mistake you're probably making



Relax – it's not your fault and it's easily fixed. Here's how...

HOW TO GET A GRADUATE JOB NOW

I know what you want. You want to find a good graduate job and start working. Then you can get on with living your life and not have to think about any of this boring careers stuff anymore. When you've spent tens of thousands of pounds on getting your degree, that's reasonable – isn't it?

Yes – if you were graduating in the 1970s, 80s or 90s. Back then, you could pick a career from a list – from accountant to zoo keeper – and just start. Recognising your dazzling potential, a nice employer would take you under their wing and train you up to do the job (while paying you a small-but-fair salary). Then, for the next 40 years of your life, you would work your way up the ladder, gaining more responsibility and earning more money, until you retired with a big house and a fat pension. Perhaps that's what your parents did. And with a good degree under your belt, that's probably what you assumed you would do, too.

But this is now, not then. In the last 10 to 15 years, all the rules about planning, starting and navigating your career have changed – forever. Nobody is telling graduates this, but it is happening. Shortly, I'll explain why this massive shift has happened, but for now all you need to know is this: the old ways no longer work. The game has changed.

The big mistake hundreds of thousands of graduates are making is trying to get their career started without seeing it in the context of what's happening around them. The world is changing, and graduates who don't realise this – nor understand what that means for their own job hunt and career plans, here and now – will struggle to get their career going. Guaranteed. That's probably where you are now, which is why you bought this book (good decision, by the way).

The bad news is that you probably won't be able to sleepwalk your way into a graduate job – and certainly not your 'dream' graduate job. But as you're smart enough to have discovered Graduate Fog and found this book, you've probably worked that one out already. The good news? This book will show you how to



Megan

Posted on Graduate Fog – Jan 3, at 12.59 pm

“When my dad graduated in 1979, he found a well-paid job straight away – with no experience – and regular promotions and pay rises followed. What happened?”

shift your thinking so that everything starts to make a lot more sense. I'll teach you the new rules of the game – so it becomes one you can actually win. Then, you'll be able to make smarter decisions about your job hunt and how to navigate your career in the next few

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years. If you've been job-hunting for a while without success, you will find out why you haven't lucked out yet. And, once you've mastered this new way of thinking, you'll be happy to discover that it is far more exciting than the old way.

Think that sounds too much like hard work? Believe me – battling on *without* making this shift is going to be a lot harder. And I promise that none of what I'm going to tell you is rocket science. If you're clever enough to get a degree, you're clever enough to understand the new laws of graduate job-hunting. So, do yourself a favour and keep reading...



Abs

Posted on Graduate Fog – Dec 21, at 11:34 am

“I knew it would be hard to find a job when I graduated – but not this hard! I assumed a first in politics from Edinburgh would count for something – but I’m still waiting...”

No grad is an island

In June 2008, I published my first book *Dude, Where's my Career? The Guide for Baffled Graduates*. It was a good book – it had lovely reviews, got masses of press coverage and sold 3,000 copies. It contained loads of brilliant advice and information – and lots of graduates told me it was the best graduate careers book they'd found. I'm proud of that.

But it wasn't a *great* book – and now I know why. I made the same mistake you are making now. I was looking at graduate job-hunting in isolation, without insisting that my readers step back and look at the big picture first. Without forcing them to factor in the seismic shifts happening all around us today.

Here is the thing. Your career is not something that exists independently from everything else. It is not something you can plan and then just do. Your career is a series of jobs you take, based on where your skills are most relevant, applicable, sellable and valuable at the time. When the world is changing so fast – socially, politically, technologically and economically – a career plan you create aged 21 is going to become out of date pretty quickly. A career is no longer something you can plan in advance, but is now something you navigate as you go along. If you haven't yet chosen what you want to do with the next 40 years of your life, this is good news for you. As you'll discover in Chapter 2, you don't need a plan before you can get cracking. In fact, it can actually be better to stay open-minded and figure it out as you go along.

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If you *do* have a career in mind, I'll help you make sure you've made a good decision and picked an industry that is worthy of your talent and hard work and – crucially – has a future. If you've been struggling to find a job for a while now, it's possible you need to re-think your goal. I know that's annoying, but it's not a disaster. And believe me, it's better that you do this now rather than plug away and realise in 10 years' time that it was a bad call. Being left with a decade of experience in a dead industry is not a good place to be (yes, this can and does happen to people. It has happened to several of my friends).

Even if you have chosen an industry that *has* a bright future, you *still* need this book, because your industry, like every industry, is going to keep changing – which means you're going to need to keep up. See what I mean? *Nobody* gets to sleepwalk anymore.

The economy, Brexit and other nightmares

We are living in crazy times. This is an extraordinary era in which to be alive – and a tricky one if you're young. In the last few years, the UK economy has been downright weird. Following years of financial boom (roughly coinciding with Tony Blair's time as Prime Minister), the 2007 crash triggered an almighty recession. A few years later, David Cameron's government declared our economy had recovered, but critics feared all was not quite as it seemed, and that deep problems lurked just below the surface.

FOUR REASONS TO BE CHEERFUL

Yes, it's a tough time to be a job-seeking graduate. But here's why the glass is half full...

1. You have a degree. Unemployment is much higher among people your age who haven't been to university, so spare a thought for them.

2. So much change means whole

new industries are springing up – and now is a great time to jump in, feet first. As we'll see in Chapter 2, today's graduates have a vast range of exciting options to investigate in sectors that didn't even exist a couple of years ago.

3. You are a 'digital native' – you've grown up using the internet – which makes you a big asset

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True, more people were in work. But were these new vacancies good quality jobs? Desperate jobseekers reported lowering their sights and taking anything they could get, including part-time work (when they wanted full-time hours), positions they were overqualified for, and zero-hours contracts. Pay was still a problem too. While ‘fat cat’ bosses’ salaries soared, ordinary people’s wages remained remarkably low.



InternArmy

Posted on Graduate Fog – Oct 8, at 1.30 pm

“The careers advice I was given at uni all feels out-of-date because of the recession. It’s like nobody wants to admit that things have changed.”

The latest shock has been Brexit. While the full effects of Britain’s decision to leave the EU remain unclear, it seems likely we face at least a short period of economic turbulence caused by the uncertainty of our country’s financial status.

Throughout all this turmoil, young people have taken a hammering, with unemployment consistently the highest among under-25s. Finding a job in a downturn is tough at any age, but finding your first job during a downturn is even trickier (without experience or contacts to help you out).

Even taking a temporary or ‘stop-gap’ job while you hunt for a proper graduate role is likely to leave you worse off than older people. While workers over 25 are entitled to the new National Living Wage (£7.20 per hour), those aged 21 to 24 are

to potential employers. They won’t admit it, but most people over 40 are scared of the internet. They know they need to start using Facebook and Twitter and get their heads around blogging, but they don’t know where to start. You aren’t scared of this stuff – which makes you enormously valuable to them. Milk it.

4. You have this book, lovingly crafted for graduates in exactly your situation and written by someone who knows what she’s talking about and knows what it feels like to be in your shoes. This is the book I needed when I graduated – but no-one had written it then.

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only entitled to the crummy old National Minimum Wage (£6.95 per hour, from 1 October 2016). Yes, for doing exactly the same job. And let's not even mention your student debt or the dire state of the housing market.

The 'average' graduate salary is supposedly £30,000¹, but the employers quizzed for this statistic are large multi-national corporations, law firms and accountants, who pay way above what most graduates earn. If I had to hazard a guess at the true average graduate salary from what Graduate Fog's users tell me – that is, the average salary of those earning above the minimum wage – I'd say it was around £18,000. Factor in the number doing unpaid (or very low-paid) internships – more of which later – and the figure plummets further. Taking all this together, it's no

YIKES – SHOULD I DO A POSTGRAD COURSE?

Just to kill time until the economy calms down? No! I know the world of work can seem scary, and it's tempting to run back to the safety of academia. But signing up for further education simply to avoid job-hunting is likely to be an expensive mistake. There are no guarantees the job market will have improved by the time you complete your studies, and even if it does, you will be competing with yet another crop of graduates. It breaks my heart that so many graduates are still making the mistake of assuming that the more qualifications they have, the greater their chances of getting a better (or better-paid) job at the end of it. Too late they discover the assumption is unfounded.

Almost without exception, what employers value nowadays is experience and industry knowledge, so the sooner you can get out and

start working, the better. Unless you have the money to do it for fun, the only reason to do a postgraduate course is if you have spoken to lots of people already working in your chosen industry and they say that this qualification is the only way to get where you need to be. Even then, think carefully. Remember that universities are selling these courses, so their opinion on their value is biased. Don't be dazzled by statistics – these can easily be tweaked to sound more impressive than they actually are. And other postgrads will tell you it's brilliant because they need to believe they haven't wasted their own money. If you do the course, how many other people will be doing it for the same reasons? And are there enough jobs for all of you? Be honest – are you the kind of person who might never feel ready to take the plunge and start a proper job?

¹Source: 'The Graduate Market in 2016', High Fliers, 2016, ²source: The Insolvency Service, Dec 2011

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wonder thousands of graduates have opted to go bankrupt in the last two years – and experts warn this trend is set to increase².

To make matters worse, the retirement age is being raised – and it's been predicted that more older people hanging on to their (often well-paid) jobs at the end of their career will mean less money in the pot for companies to spend on paying their younger staff. This could potentially result in even fewer jobs for the young – who are likely to be paid even less³. When you manage to find a job, don't hold your breath for a pay rise any time soon.

Given all this, you might think people would have sympathy for the young – but no. Instead, an unpleasant undercurrent of ageism against you is growing, with graduates being on the receiving end of some of the most vicious attacks. So-called 'graduate bashing' has become a favourite hobby of many newspaper columnists (all wave to Jan Moir of the *Daily Mail*). With no real understanding of this issue – and apparently no compassion – these armchair experts are lining up to call you 'entitled' and 'arrogant'. Your crime? Hoping to get something better than a shop job (or an unpaid internship) after spending tens of thousands of pounds on your degree. What a spoilt lot you are.

Even graduates who *have* managed to find permanent jobs aren't safe. When redundancies are made, it's almost always the junior staff who are axed first – even though your salaries are a fraction of what your bosses are earning. The people who make these decisions are the same people who mysteriously manage to hang on to their jobs. Funny that, isn't it?

Internships

As if the economy and its associated problems wasn't bad enough news for graduates, suddenly everybody seems to think that young people should work for free – by doing unpaid internships. The spread and normalisation of this damaging practice is even more baffling when you discover that we have a National Minimum Wage law, which says workers aged 21-24 must be paid at least £6.95 per hour (from October 2016), and workers aged 25 or over must be



Susan

Posted on Graduate Fog – Feb 1, at 6.03 pm

“My three-month internship at an art gallery in London didn't even pay travel expenses. I should have asked but I was too scared of being blacklisted.”

³ Source: Norton Rose, Sep 2011

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paid the new National Living Wage (£7.20 per hour) – and they can't waive their right to pay. So all these companies are breaking the law? Yes, that's right. Shocking, isn't it?

Unpaid internships exploit those who do them and exclude those who can't afford to do them. What's more, as a mechanism for getting graduates into work, they suck. Internships are supposed to lead to paid, permanent jobs – but there is growing evidence that they are actually *replacing* paid, permanent jobs. All they lead to is more unpaid internships. It's hardly surprising – why would a company pay someone to do a job when someone else will do it for free?

More often than not, the people who benefit the most from unpaid internships are employers, who get unlimited admin support they don't have to pay for. When everybody is prepared to 'offer' unpaid experience but nobody is prepared to offer actual jobs that pay actual money, how exactly are unpaid internships supposed to be helping young people get their adult lives started? Unpaid internships are not a solution – they are already a big part of the problem.

Why is the government doing nothing about this? Good question. It's because it's really very inconvenient that this mass exploitation of young people is illegal –

SHOULD I MOVE ABROAD?

To escape what's happening here? Yes, perhaps. A growing number of graduates are thinking along the same lines. OK, so you're skint and a bit directionless – but you're also young, capable and have no responsibilities (probably). Why not take advantage of this, pack a bag and go? Of course, the UK isn't the only country with major economic problems, but not every nation is struggling in the same way. For example, it is a good time to teach English in Europe, as a growing number of young people see language skills as a way to

dramatically boost their employment prospects abroad, if their own country is in trouble. And remember that in many Eastern countries, business is booming. Could you work for a Western company in China or India? Plus, foreign offices are often packed with young staff, as they're the most likely to be up for an adventure. Working abroad can be a welcome addition to your CV – it suggests you're mature and independent and gives you great material at interviews for subsequent jobs, wherever they may be.

so our politicians would really rather you didn't make a fuss about it (and that Graduate Fog and the other interns' rights campaigners didn't draw attention to it). You see, in times of economic trouble, politicians fall over themselves to be seen to be encouraging businesses to grow. Reminding businesses that it's illegal not to pay their young staff could be seen as giving them a hard time. In the meantime, young, unpaid workers are effectively propping up companies that are not really viable and need a new business model (or should fold). This means unpaid interns are also keeping the economy afloat. Is it fair to put that burden on you? No.



TIP Join the fight for a fairer deal for interns! Visit GraduateFog.co.uk, follow us on Twitter @GraduateFog or friend us on Facebook

So, you get the picture. Unpaid internships have created yet another big headache for job-seeking graduates. Indeed, they are such a huge issue that they've got their own chapter in this book (Chapter 3). But for now, all you need to know is that the ferocious spread of this legally and ethically dodgy practice has proved to be extremely damaging for today's graduates – and is yet another reason why you may be finding it difficult to get your career started.

A glut of graduates

So far, we have looked at reasons why there seem to be so few graduate jobs around. But there is another question worth considering, too: why are there so many *graduates* around? In 2001, over 271,000 people graduated from their first degree in the UK. By 2015, that number had risen to nearly 396,000⁴. Looking back, we can see that a series of poorly planned decisions has meant that the politicians – from all parties – have made a right royal mess of higher education. Tony Blair's Labour party, which came to power in 1997, wanted 50% of young people to go to university. Higher education would no longer be for the snooty, privately-educated elite – it would be for everybody, from all backgrounds, they said. Bright, hardworking kids from poorer families on council estates would become doctors and lawyers. This is called – somewhat patronisingly – 'social mobility' (you move up the social scale, see?). And thinking it is happening gives everybody a warm, fuzzy feeling inside.

But this wasn't just about social mobility; there appeared to be sound economic reasons for multiplying the number of university places available. The big idea was that more graduates would result in a better educated workforce and a more competitive economy. The world's best entrepreneurs and biggest businesses would flock to Britain,

⁴ Source: Higher Education Statistics Authority, 2016

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attracted by the quantity of super-bright young staff they could hire. We would all live happier, more fulfilled lives than ever before in history – and our wallets would be bulging with fifties. That way, we would keep buying more plasma TVs, over-priced houses, fancy trainers and organic vegetables – to keep the ‘new millennium’ economy booming. No doubt the decision-makers – an astonishingly vain lot – also assumed the world would look at us and say ‘Wow, how did little old Great Britain manage that? Their politicians must be a super-impressive group of people.’

Only that’s not what happened. At first glance, that looks like a good plan – but the truth is that nobody really thought it through. Where were all these fabulous new graduate jobs going to come from? What would happen if the economy didn’t keep growing as glass-half-full analysts said it would (people tend to be overly optimistic during boom years, assuming the good times are the new norm)? What would happen if we hit a recession (which, of course, we did)? If these jobs didn’t materialise, wouldn’t a large chunk of those graduates just end up doing the non-graduate jobs they would have got anyway, if they hadn’t been to university? Not only did our politicians not have answers to these questions, it now seems that nobody even *asked* them.

CAN I GO TRAVELLING?

With no job to resign from and no flat to sub-let, many graduates think the end of university is the perfect time to go travelling. After the stress of finals, a change of scene seems appealing before you get stuck into starting your career. Despite their uni debt, many graduates find ways to organise trips, at least for a couple of months if not for a whole gap ‘yah’. If it’s a holiday, enjoy it – but don’t forget about the career stuff completely. Travelling is a great chance to meet people from all walks of life, so talk to everyone about what jobs they’ve done, what decisions they’ve made and why.

If higher education had stayed free – or very cheap – perhaps it wouldn’t have mattered very much whether these graduate jobs materialised. We’d have just had rather overeducated (and disappointed) young people doing jobs they didn’t need a degree for. But higher education didn’t stay free. Instead, the price of going to university kept going up and up... and up. And young people – encouraged by their schools, parents and, yes, politicians – kept signing up in droves. Business was booming for the universities, particularly with popular courses like media studies, which they discovered were easy-peasy to sell. But was getting a degree really the right thing for all these young people to be doing?

There was something else they forgot to consider: wouldn't multiplying the number of graduates reduce the value of a degree? If everybody has a degree, doesn't this make its worth drop through the floor, with qualifications from less prestigious universities being valued at far less than one from Oxford or Cambridge, even though they cost the same? And won't employers become even more demanding about added extras, like work experience? Bingo. This is exactly what's happened.



WestLondonGirl

Posted on Graduate Fog – Jan 17, at 4.05 pm

“If I was given the choice again, I’m not sure I’d go to university. It seems like there are just too many graduates – and not enough jobs.”

The digital revolution

With the economy in such dire straits and the market flooded with graduates, it's no wonder your job hunt has been such a nightmare. But there is a third thing you need to consider – and it is far more significant. It is the arrival of digital technology.

I've just turned 37 this year, yet I'm officially a fossil. I graduated from Durham University in 2000 (with a 2.1 – just! – in psychology, if you're interested), and I'm not kidding – people had only just started to use email regularly. The verb 'to Google' didn't exist yet. My first job was for a recruitment company called eBusinesspeople. Nobody says eBusiness anymore – but at the time, the brightest

WAS MY DEGREE A WASTE OF MONEY?

Honestly? Nobody knows. You'll hear politicians and universities quote a supposed 'graduate premium' of £100,000 (the estimated extra you'll earn over your lifetime, versus a non-graduate) – but that figure looks increasingly iffy. A recent report¹ even suggested there may be no premium at all for graduates in many professions, once their

student debt is taken into account (ouch, sorry). This isn't all down to tuition fees – it's also because in many industries (except for finance and law), salaries have grown very slowly or hardly at all. As for the question of whether your degree specifically was worth it? That all depends on your ability to be flexible and opportunistic as your career progresses.

¹ Source The Graduate Premium: Mama, myth or plain mis-selling? Intergenerational Foundation, 2016

WHY HASN'T MY UNIVERSITY CAREERS SERVICE TOLD ME ANY OF THIS?

Because they haven't even twigged that it's happening. I know – you'd have thought it would be their job to keep their finger on the pulse with this stuff, wouldn't you? But no. Ask anyone older than you and they'll tell you that university careers advice has always been rubbish. Don't forget, many of their staff have never had a job other than being a careers adviser.

A growing number of people (myself included) think careers advice needs a total overhaul to make it relevant, appealing and useful to today's students and graduates, who are in greater need of good-quality advice

than ever before, considering the circumstances you're graduating into. And let's not forget that you've just given your university tens of thousands of pounds in tuition fees, so some decent 'after care' on the jobs front doesn't seem like much to ask. And don't get me started on Prospects.ac.uk, supposedly the 'official' graduate careers advice website (who says they're official? And how is it so bad when it is so big? The mind boggles). Anyway, the point is that most traditional sources of careers advice are of pretty poor quality, so don't freak out if you don't find them helpful. Nobody does.

minds in commerce thought that the way the internet impacted their business would simply become a new department in their company. They had no idea that the internet would *completely revolutionise* every aspect of their company. That is, if it didn't wipe it out first. What they didn't realise was that they were witnessing the start of what has since been termed 'the digital revolution'. It is called that because it has – and will – change the world we live in as much as the agricultural revolution (between 1750 and 1900) or the industrial revolution (1750 to 1850) did. It really is That Big.

We are only just beginning to discover how the internet will transform everything we do. But there are already some early examples of how technology has changed our everyday lives. Before Google, how did people find information? They went to the library. Before Facebook, how did people keep in touch with their friends? They emailed them individually. Before email, they phoned. Before mobiles, they rang each other on land lines (and were just never late). Before computers, how did people get *anything done* at work? I have no idea. Even *I* don't remember offices before computers.

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The point is, we have already seen enormous changes driven by the arrival of technology – and that’s only the very start of it. In 45 years’ time – when you will be finishing your career – what will life be like? And what on earth will your job be? It probably hasn’t even been invented yet.