

DAILY GRIND

Students deal with dead-end jobs

BY JEFF WOLFSHOHL
The Battalion

"Taking this job couldn't be that bad," someone might say to themselves. Money is lacking and time is there. The answer sometimes seems so obvious.

Once a student takes on the burden of a bad job, responsibility clashes with free will, attitudes change and the job becomes Satan's handmaiden.

Elizabeth Green, a senior journalism major, worked as an intern for a newspaper in Houston.

Green said one thing that can ruin a job is a complete lack of assistance at his job.

"There were about four people who worked there," Green said. "The guy who owned the paper never came into the office before 1 p.m. I was the only person who got there on time."

The internship position was supposed to be a learning experience and benefit the intern. Green said her internship was nowhere near this description.

"I didn't have any set job; it was just whatever came up," Green said. "I was the receptionist until my boss arrived; then I would clean up around his office. It was so disorganized; it was ridiculous."

Green said she left the internship earlier than she planned to because things reached a breaking point — no pay.

"I also found out that the internship was actually unpaid," Green said. "It was my understanding that this job would be paid, but things changed."

Things can change, sometimes for the better, but for students it is usually for the worse.

Keith Tomlinson, a senior mathematics major, worked as an engineer's assistant during the summer and discovered a lonely cubicle can be a step up.

"I didn't have an office for myself, so I sat in the hallway with the computer I used," Tomlinson said.

Tomlinson said the worst days of his job were filled with pointless routine.

"A set of blueprints, 600 pages long, came in from an Army job the company was doing," Tomlinson said. "I had to make copies of the sets, punch holes, staple, and put them in notebooks. Everything took three days to complete."

If redundancy was not enough, Tomlinson said the glow of the computer screen haunted him every day. To make matters worse, he possessed a unique skill for a job requiring a great deal of squinting.

"For eight hours a day, I was staring at a computer screen," Tomlinson said. "I had to write programming code to get the company back on track because no one knew how to do it."

Tomlinson said his co-workers did not even attempt to forge a relationship because of his "intern" status.

"Everyone in the office was condescending when they did speak to me," Tomlinson said.

Tomlinson also said he is not one to enjoy an office job. He said that he would go home and try to think of something he actually accomplished during the day.

"I felt worthless for eight hours a day," Tomlinson said.

Why, considering the downside, would students go through the hassle of the worthless work experience in the first place?

Leigh Turner, director of the Career Center, said students take bad jobs because it is easier to take the first job offer they get.

"Looking for jobs for some can be a painful experience," Turner said. "So when students, for example, hear about a job from a friend, they see it as a viable option."

Abby Johnson, a junior theater arts major, said students also take wretched jobs in order to make some quick money.

"That is the only reason I took the job that I had," Johnson said.



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY GUY ROGERS AND ROBERT HYNCEK/THE BATTALION

Johnson worked as a telemarketer, selling Sprint long distance plans, said she disliked the disrespect she received.

"I called people up and tried to convince them to change to Sprint, and most people just said, 'No, just go away you bitch,'" Johnson said.

Johnson said her job was terrible because of the constant exposure to negative attitudes.

"I quit because I called this one guy and he completely cussed me out, beyond what I have ever heard anywhere," Johnson said.

Johnson said as if the antipathy of the customer was not enough, she was also subject to random inspection by her superiors.

"There are cubby holes and you are very cramped in the small space you have," Johnson said. "The overseers will, without notice, listen to your conversations with the potential customers."

A telemarketer has to also work with names, which means there are likely to be problems with gender-neutral monickers.

"The computer brought up the name 'Stacey,' but left out the title, so I assumed that it was a female," Johnson said. "When I asked for a 'Ms. Stacey,' the man who answered the phone said it was 'Mr. Stacey,' then hung up the phone."

Johnson said another downside to her job was a lack of any freedom of action.

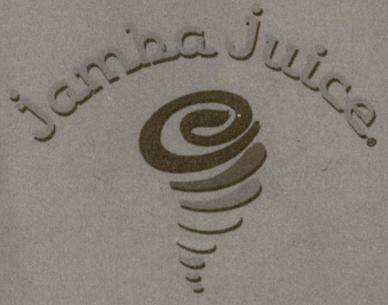
She said there were times when hanging up on an irate customer would have been appropriate, but rules prohibited her from doing it.

"I had to wait for people to finish, so I could conclude the call, even if they were cussing me out," Johnson said.

As terrible as a job may be, sometimes there are moments that make every job worth remembering.

"I figured out that one guy I was speaking to actually was getting off to my voice," Johnson said. "I didn't care if he was masturbating; I just wanted to sell because there is commission every hour that is constantly pushed on the workers. When he climaxed, he just said, 'No thanks, I already have Sprint.'"

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