

Help! Save My Career!

by Donald Asher, America's Job Search Guru

(this article originally appeared in *USAirways Magazine*)

Dear Guru Don:

My stepson got his bachelor's degree months ago, and so far he has done nothing about getting a job. All he does is sleep all day. When he finally gets up, he hangs around in the basement playing online video games, apparently with people in other countries. Then he goes out all night with friends. My husband says he's just in a phase, and he'll get over it. Right after he graduated he had an unpaid internship with a startup company that said it was going to hire him, but then it didn't. Since then he's been in a funk. I say he has it too comfortable. He doesn't have any bills to pay, he gets free meals, and except for doing his own laundry, he doesn't lift a finger around here. He doesn't even buy gas for the car we bought him. He's not a bad kid, but he's not motivated, and his skillset is too weak to get a real job. I don't want to name his undergraduate institution, but it is one of the best in the country! How could this happen? His education cost well over \$200,000. It's not looking like a good investment so far. I could get him a job at the company where I work, but I don't know if I want to be responsible for the outcome. We haven't really talked about it, but I think my husband has the same position about getting him a job at his firm. What do I do to build a fire under this wanna be bum?

Sign me,

Concerned Stepmom in Confidential Suburbia

Dear Stepmom:

I seriously doubt this young man wants to be a bum. He is stunned by the real world, which his college experience did not so far prepare him for. You say he's not a bad kid, and I take that to mean that he is smart enough and did well enough in college that you are surprised he is not yet launched in a professional career.

You have every right to be concerned, but I would remind you that there is a long history of students returning from "the very best" universities and waiting for some kind of sign from the heavens about what to do next. Yes, it's stressful for concerned parents, but it's certainly nothing new in the history of post-adolescence. Just in my own neighborhood, a young man got a degree in chemical engineering and came home to be unemployed for months and months. Another young graduate with a business degree decided to take up basement living, like your stepson, and let the weeks roll by. For reasons known only to herself, she didn't try to get a job through the on-campus interview process, and found the open job market daunting.

Every fall I get queries like this from parents all over the country. Here's how I helped my neighbors, and how you can help your stepson:

The Five Step Plan for Removing Graduates from Basements

Step 1: Invest in the Transition

You put \$200,000 into this young man's education. Don't starve him for resources now. He needs a range of interview clothes, and a reliable car to drive to interviews. Make sure he has these. His alma mater's career center will be able to help him with resumes, job-search plans, and connections. If his alma mater is far away, it may have a reciprocal agreement with a local university, where he can get services for a small fee. Push him to get registered one way or another with a college career center. In addition to this, he may benefit from working with an independent career counselor, which you would be very smart to cover the cost for. He may need to see a resume writer, another expense you should not hesitate to cover. Don't just throw money at the problem. Review each expense--and make sure he utilizes the services you pay for--but step up with the cash to support his job-search effort. Your investment in your stepson's search shows him you are serious about his needs, and may itself be a catalyst for change.

Step 2: Let Him Pursue His Real Interests

Sometimes the real barrier to a search is not motivation, but a wrong direction. Give your young seeker permission to pursue any life-launching job he wants. If he wants to go into art or music or church charities, let him. Just tell him, "If this direction is of interest to you, go for it. Just be mindful that you need to support yourself now, and get out there and see what you can do." A friend of mine was aghast when his son turned down a financial job in favor of a job in concert security. I advised him to back off and let the young man pursue his dream. America is the land of second chances, I told him. If concert security doesn't work out for him, he can recover. *He was the first in his class to make six figures.* Unconstrained zeal can make up for a lot of career challenges.

Step 3: Require Planning, Activity and Reporting

In return for the above two gifts, require this young man to get out of bed and start working at finding a job. He needs to agree to apply to a certain number of jobs per week, and to leave the house and have networking lunches with his friends who have jobs, the ones who are not up all night. Every Sunday evening he should tell you what he is going to do in the coming week, and what he did in the week just ending. The penalty for non-performance is not really important, but the planning and reporting are absolutely critical. Oh, and one more thing, *do not let this young man conduct his job search 100% online.* He needs to meet people, face to face, as part of the search process. To learn more about this, see my book, *How to Get Any Job with Any Major.*

Step 4: Make Him Volunteer

If his search goes on for more than 30 days (which it already has), make him volunteer somewhere for 10 to 20 hours a week. It will help him get his mind off of himself, and it will get him in contact with a new set of people who can help him in his job search. If nothing else, it will help him get used to showing up on time and meeting the needs of others. It doesn't really matter what charity he serves. A client of mine met the spouse of a doctor at a soup kitchen, and ended up with a job in medical administration. Volunteering boosts confidence, improves

communication skills, lifts moods, and has myriad other benefits, and that's just for the volunteers.

Step 5: Set a Deadline for the Gravy Train to End

Your stepson is indeed too comfortable. If you're not careful, he'll go into a full retreat from adult life. So set a deadline after which he will have to begin paying rent to live under your roof. My recommendation is to set the deadline out about 60 to 90 days, and have the rent escalate over time. For example, "If you don't have a job in three months, you will have to pay \$100 per month rent to live here, \$200 the second month, \$300 the third, etc." He can mow lawns or babysit to earn that money. A little of that, and he'll start looking pretty hard for a job, I assure you.

Oh, and one final thing: You need to sit down with your husband and plan this all out in advance. If you don't come at this former student with a united front, you may be the one looking for a new place to live, while the boys' club goes on without you.

My best wishes for your continued success,

Donald Asher

Send your career emergency to don@donaldasher.com, and watch this space for Asher's response.

BIO: Donald Asher is a nationally known writer and speaker on careers and higher education. He is the author of eleven books, including *Cracking the Hidden Job Market*; *How to Get Any Job: Life Launch and Re-Launch for Everyone Under 30*; *Graduate Admissions Essays*, the best-selling guide to the graduate admissions process; *Asher's Bible of Executive Resumes*; *Cool Colleges for the Hyper-Intelligent, Self-Directed, Late Blooming, and Just Plain Different*; and *Who Gets Promoted, Who Doesn't, and Why* (named Business Book of the Year 2008 by national career columnist Joyce Lain Kennedy). Asher speaks over 100 days a year from coast to coast, to college and corporate audiences. He is eager to hear your career emergency.