

KIM: Career wisdom found everywhere, even the trash

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INVESTING

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College is among life's biggest financial outlays, so what can students do **before and after** they've earned their diploma to protect and enhance their return on this monumental investment?

Michael Cascio was an executive at the National Geographic Channel, A&E and Animal Planet. He won four Emmys, had two Oscar nominations and is now CEO of M&C Media, a video-programming advisory firm. Last September he wrote a terrific column for *The New York Times*, "Pearls of Career Wisdom, Found in the Trash."

Cascio said he interviewed lots of job candidates who showed up with polished resumes, anxious to show off their knowledge of the business. So, they were often caught off-guard by his favorite question: **"What did you do in the summers during college and high school?"**

He said he learned more from responses to that question than any other because before he was a Vice-President or CEO, he worked as a janitor for two summers, cleaning toilets, mopping floors and smelling like garbage. It had nothing to do with his chosen profession, yet he believes nothing was better for preparing him for work and life as an adult.

He was interested in entertainment and started at the very bottom rung of the ladder, as a janitor at Wolf Trap, an outdoor performance venue near Washington, D.C. His crew cleaned-up backstage and throughout the park. He learned firsthand about the "hierarchy of employment faced by anyone with a job" and "peeked into the window of class distinctions that are still all around us."

Performers and patrons generally ignored and pretended the janitors were invisible. This left a life-long impression on Cascio, who says "a simple hello or smile goes a long way in acknowledging our mutual humanity."

Unlike most of Cascio's co-workers, his boss was several years older and this was his full-time job. He was less-educated and his life experience caused him to have different views than Cascio and his fellow collegians. Cascio learned **you don't have to agree with everything the boss says; you just have to do the work.** He said this lesson was helpful with bosses throughout his career.

Not only did he ultimately find his janitorial supervisor to be fair and wise, he received the best career guidance in his life from him: **"Never turn down a chance to take on more responsibility."**

In sum, his janitorial job taught him the basics of all employment: You have to show up every day, and on time. You have to appreciate and learn from everyone who works around you. You should acknowledge—and learn to deal with—the pecking order in the working world. You have to exert yourself in ways you may not have learned in school. And you often have to do things that have nothing—and everything—to do with your career and life ahead.

I would add work is not an extension of college. Your degree/academic pedigree may get you in the door, but your GSD (Get Stuff Done) will be the key to your success. Be glad for the opportunity to start at the bottom and work your way up. Be low maintenance and don't need constant praise. Strive to make your boss look good. Focus on generating more value than you receive in compensation.

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