

BLUE COLLAR & Proud OF IT

The All-in-One Resource
for Finding Freedom, Financial Success,
and Security Outside the Cubicle

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Health Communications, Inc.
Deerfield Beach, Florida

www.bcibooks.com

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
is available through the Library of Congress.**

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READER'S NOTE: The job statistics provided are taken from 2006–2008 data. Given economic conditions and market fluctuations, these will be subject to change.

ISBN-10: 0-7573-0778-7

ISBN-13: 978-0-7573-0778-2

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Publisher: Health Communications, Inc.

3201 S.W. 15th Street

Deerfield Beach, FL 33442–8190

Cover design by Larissa Hise Henoach

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INTRODUCTION

In case you haven't guessed from the title of this book, I am blue collar and proud of it. I love to dig in the dirt, can't sit still, and totally enjoy being outside all day long. I run a million-dollar landscaping business outside of Boston in an upscale suburb. I worked my way up the ladder; have five children, a beautiful house, and a wonderful wife; and I enjoy taking vacations with my family. I read the *Wall Street Journal* religiously and as many books as I can, and most of my TV watching consists of the National Geographic Channel and business shows.

For years I've been watching as my kids and other youngsters are told by their teachers and their guidance counselors that if they don't go to college, they won't succeed. I didn't go to college, even though my family expected me to go. Frankly, I wouldn't have made it to graduation, and I know I would have hated it. I respect college and the people who go, but for some reason, our society has a hard time accepting that college simply isn't for everyone. I love learning and I haven't stopped learning, but college isn't the only way to learn.

In July 2003, I started a website called BlueCollarandProudofIt.com because I was tired of watching guidance counselors, teachers, parents, and society in general push thousands of kids out of high school and into college, while many of them went kicking and screaming. I've watched as they went off to schools with no direction and no interest. Inevitably they started feeling worse about themselves in college—all while accumulating huge amounts of debt from the loans they took out to pay for their schooling. Consider that the average cost of college in 2008, including room and board, for in-state students at a four-year state institution was \$14,203, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. And if you were headed to a private university, the average annual price tag was \$38,400. Then, just think, if you drop out, you still owe that money, plus you have to start over and figure out what you want to do. That's a lot of money, especially if you're unsure of why you're borrowing it in the first place.

I want more people to think about the alternatives and realize that you can be proud about going into a trade. A blue-collar career can be a choice that you feel good about as opposed to a fallback option. This is why I started my website: to provide some wisdom and encouragement and to add a different voice to the chorus of people who will tell you what to do with your life. This book persuades you to follow your own personal desires and tells you how to get the education or training *you* need, which might not be the education your parents and teachers are pushing you to get.

I've been amazed at how many people have e-mailed me from all over North America, excited to know that someone is advocating for them. I've heard from teachers who are happy to hear someone say that we should be proud of the kids who choose to make something of themselves in the trades, and I've heard from students who are afraid to

tell their parents they don't want to go to college. I've heard from adults who spent years in the white-collar world only to ultimately find their passion in blue-collar work.

Blue-collar work isn't about avoiding the responsibilities that people think come only with white-collar jobs. We blue-collar workers own nice homes and run lucrative businesses. We, too, are looking to be challenged and to exceed our own expectations. We want to excel professionally. But we also love working with our hands or in nontraditional settings. How many people are sitting at a desk right now, tucked away in a cubicle, feeling boxed in and miserable, wishing they could be doing something physical instead?

Blue-collar workers are everywhere, and they are working incredibly hard to build this country, rebuild their communities, and more. We have factory workers operating equipment worth millions of dollars with technical skills that surpass the level of expertise that many people have in white-collar jobs. Why don't we take these tradespeople more seriously? It's about time we respect the skills they've acquired and the trades they are in and the work they do. We've treated many industries as if they are invisible, but we need to start paying attention to the construction industry, to automotive technicians, and to electricians, among scores of others.

I don't have anything against Shakespeare, but you don't need to get a degree in English at a four-year university if you're interested in landscape design. You don't need to be a communications major at a cost of more than \$30,000 a year if all you've ever really wanted to do is become a renovation mason. We don't all want to sit in cubicles, pushing paper, working in middle-management jobs, traveling around the country for business meetings. If that's what you want, that's fine. But if you don't want that kind of life, why go to college and prepare for it?

Wall Street jobs sound sexy and being a lawyer is impressive, but what if it's not for you? There are incredible jobs available with amazing potential, challenging opportunities, and great pay. President Barack Obama has laid out a plan to create 2.5 million new jobs by January 2011, largely through rebuilding roads and bridges and refurbishing and modernizing schools across the country. In Los Angeles alone, a recent tax change was approved to fund a \$1.2 billion overhaul of the city's deteriorating commuter rail, Metrolink. These are all blue-collar jobs waiting to happen. What's more, the renewable or alternative energy industries are estimating the creation of anywhere from 3 to 10 million new jobs in the next ten years.

Blue-collar workers built the United States, and we continue to build and rebuild it every day. We fix it, move it, and keep it operational twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. We are the glue that holds the community together, the people you call when your car breaks, your roads are full of potholes, and your faucet is leaking.

We are America's backbone, and we are proud of it.

Chapter 1

Success Outside the Cubicle

Imagine not being able to find a plumber to install your new dishwasher or a car mechanic to fix your broken carburetor. What if there weren't enough welders to repair our nation's crumbling bridges? What if we woke up one day and discovered that we hadn't been training enough people in the younger generation for positions in the automotive, carpentry, manufacturing, or steel industries?

We don't have to imagine any longer. While we're not about to run out of plumbers yet, and while we still have electricians to call and construction workers to hire to build our new skyscrapers, we in the United States are running low on trained, skilled workers. Meanwhile, we're pushing more kids into college, telling them it's the only way to be successful and make a life for themselves. While they are racking

up massive college loans, our skilled workforce is suffering. There aren't enough trained welders or linemen or rail conductors, but we have kids in college who are miserable, who never wanted to go, and who ultimately end up dropping out.

What if we rethought the whole equation and encouraged some of these students—especially the ones who simply aren't cut out for four years of college—to go into the blue-collar workforce? What if we told high schoolers in the United States about the possibilities that exist in the blue-collar world, about the money that could be made and the exciting businesses that blue-collar workers own and run?

Baby boomers are retiring fast, and we aren't training enough youth to take over their jobs. We should be teaching students about the trades in high school, if not earlier. We should be opening doors along these other avenues, rather than only showing them the door to college. We should be telling students that unions offer incredible apprenticeships and training programs, not to mention benefits, in almost every skilled trade. By doing so, we'd not only be benefiting society but we'd also be giving hope and motivation to many young people.

The Blue-Collar Route: A Great Time to Start

This is a great time to be thinking about going blue collar. There are 309 million people in the United States right now; that's a lot of houses to build and keep in good repair and a lot of services to provide. The Bureau of Labor Statistics has estimated that between 2004 and 2014 there will be 40 million job openings for workers who are entering the workforce without a bachelor's degree.* This is more than twice the number of jobs for people who will be graduating from four-year colleges and universities.

In Canada, 48 percent of the workforce will be between the ages of forty-five and sixty-four by 2015. Nearly 3.8 million Canadians work in five skilled trade industries, but those who are retiring aren't being adequately replaced. Only 32 percent of students ages thirteen to eighteen say they would consider a career in the skilled trades.

The Canadian Council on Learning has issued reports that signal significant workforce shortages because of the rising age of workers and the shrinking pool of people entering the skilled trades. In 2002, 26 percent of small and medium-size businesses were already facing shortages, according to the Canadian Federation of Independent Businesses. Of those companies surveyed, 64 percent said they are having difficulty finding workers because of a lack of skilled applicants.

The United States and Canada are looking closely at renewable energy options, and at ways to reduce the carbon footprint and improve the environment. Gas-guzzling cars and wasteful consumption are driving all sectors to make serious changes to improve the environment and curb destructive consuming practices. Previously, only environmentalists cared about this issue. Now politicians, private-sector companies,

Statistics provided from 2006-2008 data. Due to economic conditions, these numbers are subject to change.

and all citizens are considering it. All of this talk is already resulting in significant measures, such as building solar and wind power capabilities, that in turn create job opportunities. For the first time since the 1970s, plans are in the works for the construction of various nuclear power plants around the United States—another significant source of blue-collar jobs.

Pipelines that bring water to our homes and schools and businesses all across North America are bursting. They are in desperate need of repair. We have refineries to build and coal to extract from the earth. Green-collar jobs, discussed later in this book, are cropping up everywhere as well, available in almost every industry and all parts of the country. You could be part of this next wave.

As one example of massive workforce shortages in the United States, the American Welding Society says the country could potentially face a shortage of nearly 200,000 skilled welders by 2010. The roads, bridges, and tunnels in the United States are in the worst condition ever. The infrastructure is in disarray, and there aren't enough people to do the necessary repairs. We are headed for a major revolution in terms of alternative energy and increased energy demand, but we don't have the people to build the power plants and erect the wind turbines.

"Everything is geared toward college, and in five to ten years we won't have anyone to fill these jobs," says David Marland, the training coordinator at Local 51, the plumbing and pipefitting union in Providence, Rhode Island. "These skills and trades are for life. You can always make a living." Yet Marland has a hard time even filling his apprenticeships.

These shortages are occurring for many reasons. Clearly we haven't interested enough people in the trades. "The work ethic has changed," says Jim Geisinger, president of the Northwest Forestry Association. "Kids want to sit in front of a computer." Geisinger has watched as the

younger generations have left their traditional logging communities in droves. Many have moved to urban areas in search of white-collar work.

“When you talk to manufacturers across the country, the issue of skills shortages is a primary concern for all, no matter what region of Canada they are in,” said Perrin Beatty, president and CEO of Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters. The gaps between jobs and the skills of the incoming workforce are being noticed. Canada’s government is working to address the problem as well. “The government of Canada recognizes more and more that Canada’s growth is dependent upon people entering the skilled trades—from welders and carpenters to hairstylists and chefs,” said Diane Finley, minister of Human Resources and Social Development.

“The whole work world has changed dramatically,” says Jan Bray, executive director of the Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE), a national organization that works to improve technical education and better prepare youth for careers in the trades. “Our society doesn’t value people who work with their hands.” Bray says parents are often guilty of trying to dissuade their own children from going into the trades. “But when parents hear that you need to have a high level of math to be an auto mechanic, their perceptions start to change. You change perceptions with information.” People do start to pay attention once you tell them that they need a good brain and sufficient training to do much of the available blue-collar work. Suddenly family members listen more carefully when you talk about the trades. How do we change the perceptions that have tainted almost all of these blue-collar sectors? We need to give people more information.

The entire workforce in the United States has been projected to increase by 12.8 million people between 2006 and 2016, according to the federal government. Total employment is expected to increase by 10 percent in this same time period. Transportation, warehousing, and trucking will grow rapidly, as will jobs in the utilities. Service industries are expected to increase as well. And the occupations that include installation, maintenance, and repair will increase by 9.3 percent.

Repair work is one area of rapid change, as technological advances have become prevalent in every industry. “This isn’t about working on cars in your backyard,” says auto technician Lori Johnson. “It’s a totally different world now.” If you lift up the hood of a car, Johnson points out, you’re only going to find a few things you can touch and mess around with. Mostly, there are computerized diagnostic tests that must

be run, and codes that must be downloaded and later interpreted. And you need training to do all of this.

In the United States, much talk is taking place about nuclear power making a comeback as people turn to it as an alternative and necessary source of energy. Canada has long been more receptive to nuclear power. In the United States, though, the industry is grappling with as much as 35 percent of its workforce retiring within the next five years. The Nuclear Energy Institute predicts needing to

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“ If the traditional career and technical training does go away, the infrastructure of this country would fall apart. You wouldn’t have anyone to fix your plumbing or build and repair your home. Who would be the people fixing your electricity? ”

—Janet Bray, president of the Association for Career and Technical Education

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hire as many as 25,000 workers in that same time period. And for any new reactors that are built, the institute expects the industry to hire

1,400 to 1,800 construction workers, including skilled tradespeople, to complete the projects. Once built, approximately 400 to 700 employees are needed to run one of these plants, at which the median salary for an electrical technician is \$67,517 and a reactor operator is \$77,782. Those are serious opportunities, and yet people haven't adjusted their expectation of these jobs. They haven't taken the time to learn about them.

"A lot of schoolteachers have no idea what an ironworker does," says Marco Frausto, the president and business agent of Ironworkers Local #416 in Los Angeles. He visits local high schools to talk with students about careers in the trades. "They're more interested once they hear how much you can make." In California, a journeyman is paid \$31.83 an hour plus extensive health and pension benefits. Apprentices with a high school diploma and no prior experience start at \$15.92 an hour plus benefits, and their wages increase 5 percent every six months. Frausto says once he actually talks about the extensive skills and training needed for welding and the techniques involved, parents are more accepting. "One does not fit all," Frausto reminds students and their parents. What works for one student won't necessarily work for another.

Wake up, Mom and Dad. Look at your child and ask, *What is good for him or her? What is going to make him or her happy and successful?* Don't think, *What college do I want to see my son or daughter in next fall?* That's not going to help. If you push what you want and your child really shouldn't be going to college, you're going to end up with one very unhappy, potentially debt-laden person. Financially, your son or daughter could be saving for his or her first house rather than paying off student loans.

Before the economy became so unpredictable in 2008, U.S. trucking companies were unable to find enough truckers and predicted that by 2014 the industry would be short nearly 110,000 drivers. Because of

the increasing cost of fuel (which has slowed the trucking industry), the railroad industry is positively booming. Freight trains are moving more cargo than ever before. In 2002, the major railroads laid off about 4,700 workers. In 2006, they rehired 5,000. In 2008, the rail companies were planning to build an additional \$10 billion in tracks. And according to the Transportation Department, freight tonnage is expected to increase by close to 90 percent by 2035. Where am I going with this? All of this activity means more jobs in the transportation sector and a possible shortage of jobs if we don't have well-trained individuals ready to join these industries.

People love to say that nothing is made in America anymore. But more is produced in the United States than ever before, the top-three products being food, computers and electronics, and motor vehicles. As of 2005, the manufacturing industry was producing close to \$1.5 trillion in goods, and the United States exported more than \$1.023 trillion as compared to the \$612.1 billion in goods exported in 1996. That amount has practically doubled in less than ten years. And while the auto industry has suffered tremendously, especially in Michigan, new factories are being built in the southern states. For example, Volkswagen is building a \$1 billion manufacturing plant in Chattanooga, Tennessee, which is expected to be operational in 2011.



**Did You
KNOW?**

The oil and gas industry in Canada is booming. The demand for crude oil and natural gas has risen steadily over the past twenty years, and most of it is exported. Companies are expanding, and the industry is always in need of new employees.

In Canada, the manufacturing sector employs more than 2.3 million people, or nearly 15 percent of the working population. Combined, the manufacturing, construction, automotive, and mining sectors produce half of Canada's GDP, or more than \$550 billion in services. As in the United States, manufacturing and production are traditionally sources of significant employment in Canada.

Manufacturing jobs are changing, though, and many require more interpersonal and technical skills than before. Finding adequately trained and highly skilled employees is becoming increasingly difficult for the industry. Companies are constantly looking for employees who are more skilled and can perform in a more sophisticated work environment. The factories don't resemble those of yesteryear. The dark, dingy, dirty image that many people have in mind is no longer accurate. People can't go directly from high school into most of these jobs. It's a more sophisticated world, and with that comes a more sophisticated manufacturing industry. In a study conducted by the National Association of Manufacturing, 81 percent of companies interviewed said they faced a shortage of workers, and 90 percent said this comes from a lack of available skilled workers.

In 2006, the Ironworkers Union Local #3 in Pittsburgh was having a tough time recruiting new blood. So they launched an ad campaign with the slogan, "We don't go to the office, we build it." The national ironworkers organization has adopted the catchy slogan, and more people are paying attention, says William Ligetti, executive director of the Pittsburgh-based Ironworker Employers Association. The number of applicants to the Pittsburgh apprenticeship went up immediately. While there were once

ninety applicants per year, the union now has about 200 applying each quarter. And in turn, Ligetti said, the quality of the new hires has dramatically increased. “This is a good-paying job,” adds Ligetti. “You can go out and say, ‘Hey, I built that,’ and show your children.”

Another source of blue-collar jobs will come from America’s crumbling infrastructure. According to a 2006 study by the Federal Highway Administration, 24.5 percent of the country’s bridges were deemed “structurally deficient” or “functionally obsolete.” They were built shortly after World War II by blue-collar workers and were made to last about fifty years, so they’re all due for an upgrade. Who is going to do all of this work? These buildings and roads don’t grow from seeds. Someone has to physically go out there and build them. Infrastructure experts estimate that \$2.2 trillion in work will be needed over the next decade. That’s a lot of jobs. The construction of pipelines for natural gas will also create employment opportunities. As well, most cities around the country are facing leaky or corroded waste and water pipes that are in need of repair. Miles of these underground pipes are expected to cost each city several billion dollars to fix or replace.

Even the airlines are adding workers, thanks to the need for upgrading. In the summer of 2008, U.S. Airways hired one hundred mechanics in an effort to boost its performance and on-time record. The mechanics were brought in to troubleshoot, fix broken lights, and replace seats that wouldn’t recline. It may sound like a small number of jobs, but it’s just another way in which blue-collar America is both indispensable and always in demand.

**Did You
KNOW?**

Interestingly, Europeans don't have the same attitude about the trades as do Americans and Canadians. A study published in 2004 revealed that blue-collar workers in the United Kingdom were the happiest of all workplace employees. Hairdressers, plumbers, and chefs topped the list of the professions with the most job satisfaction. "It's a misconception that white-collar professionals have the best jobs and are therefore the happiest," said Chris Humphries, deputy director at City and Guilds, the accrediting group in England that conducted the study. "As our research proves, it's often people in vocational careers that are the most content and fulfilled." We all spend a lot of time at work, sometimes more than we should, so shouldn't we be doing something that makes us happy?

The time has come to stop turning our backs on the blue-collar jobs that have built nations. It's time to pay attention to the desires and skills of each individual, and it's past time that we put pride and value back into being a plumber, a carpenter, or a mason. We as a nation must start respecting each other for how hard we work and how well we do our work rather than by the title we have or the diplomas we hang on our walls. It's time that we as parents, teachers, businesses, and communities wake up, look around, and see the immense benefits gained and contributions made by blue-collar workers.

**Did You
KNOW?**

Many teenagers don't realize that some of the jobs in the trades actually require the same kind of hand-eye coordination that is picked up from playing video games. Most heavy equipment

operators use joysticklike levers to control their machines. Hand-eye coordination is important when using backhoes and in many construction jobs. Times have changed, and many blue-collar jobs involve highly technical machinery and computers rather than purely manual labor.

Where Did the Problem Start?

A survey done in Canada about workforce readiness and attitudes revealed that 86 percent of students said their guidance counselors had not recommended the skilled trades as an option. Seventy-two percent of those same teens said their parents had not encouraged them to go into the blue-collar trades.

Many guidance counselors are totally overwhelmed by the sheer number of students they are expected to advise. Some are responsible for as many as 600 students and have little time to tailor their advice or suggestions. Plus, one way that high schools measure their own success is by the percentage of students who go on to college after graduation. As a result, counselors almost naturally find themselves pushing college and urging students to at least give it a try. Add to all of that the fact that more community colleges have open enrollment, which means almost anyone can take classes, regardless of what kind of students he or she was in high school. The result? College students are taking remedial courses in basic math and literacy skills. Something is wrong with this situation.

Some counselors admit that they hesitate to suggest anything but college for their students, because they fear the wrath of parents who are determined to see their children enroll in a four-year university. Other

counselors are simply so overloaded with work that they don't have time to give personalized advice to each student. A study published by Northwestern University surveyed eighty guidance counselors around the United States and found that most were trained to respond to post-high school plans the same way: by talking about college. The study found that counselors were trained to help better students apply to four-year colleges, but they couldn't help much with students not planning on a four-year degree. Vocational teachers and counselors are simply not being encouraged to help work-bound students plan their careers.

**Did You
KNOW?**

Even though money isn't everything, you can earn a lot in the trades. Between 1997 and 2002, real wages for white-collar workers rose 1.5 percent. But the wages of blue-collar workers increased 4.8 percent over the same time period.

This book is about putting pride, excitement, and appeal back into the blue-collar industries. And it's about showing you the many lucrative, creative, challenging, and exciting options that exist in the blue-collar workforce. It's time that we all—parents, counselors, and students—take a strong look at each of the available options. With hard work and determination, anyone can build a successful career and life, even without college. I've done it, and many people around me have done it. Look around your community or your own family, and you'll see that successful blue-collar workers are all around you.

Don't think, though, that not going to college means that your education comes to an end. James Stone III is director of the National Research Center for Career and Technical Education in Kentucky, an

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“ People take what used
to be a respectable job
and disregard it. ”

—Blair Glenn,
California-based arborist

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organization that works to improve career and technical education (CTE) opportunities around the country. CTE is what many of us once referred to as *vo-tech* or *technical school*. Stone’s group also works to improve the transition from high school to work. He

says that forgoing college is one thing, but postsecondary training is rarely optional. “To compete globally we need smarter workers.” And by *smarter* Stone really means *better trained*. But Stone points out that nowadays students aren’t always exposed to the trades at an early age. And in some high schools, he says, a retiring woodworking or auto mechanic teacher is likely to be replaced by an English or math teacher. “The only way kids come to know these occupations is through television,” says Stone. The time for education about the trades needs to start well before high school graduation day.

My Story

If you’re heading off to college because you feel pressured to go or you feel like you’ll never make anything of yourself if you don’t go, then you’ve come to the right place. I’m proof that you can, with a lot of hard work, have a very successful and fulfilling career without college.

I’ve been working as a landscaper for twenty-eight years in Newton, Massachusetts. I didn’t go to college. My father went to Northeastern University and wore his class ring proudly every day. He worked as an executive in the finance department of a major company in the Boston area. Growing up, my two sisters and I were expected to do well in school, and college was definitely what happened after high school graduation. But I

hated school. I was rebellious. I had trouble focusing and I didn't test well. And then I started to feel stupid because I wasn't keeping up with my friends; really, I wasn't all that interested in doing so. Years later I found out that I actually had attention deficit disorder and some other learning disabilities. Some of us have other problems, such as dyslexia.

Years ago people like us were called brats—kids who couldn't keep still, who were told we were fidgety or had ants in our pants. Over the years I have seen these characteristics in me, my kids, my nephew, and my friends' kids. When you try to shape people like this, as if it's a one-size-fits-all world, you are asking for trouble. As a society we're all asking for trouble when we make this move. You're going to get a reaction if you push everyone to do the same thing. Miserable, frustrated teens, being told they are not good enough, are an unpleasant, trouble-making bunch. I know, because I was one.

I'll admit that I had a bit of a bad attitude. Deep down, though, I knew that I was not a dumb person, but still I felt so lousy about myself. Then the anger started to escalate. It's a terrible cycle. You really worry that you're stupid; at least I did, and I know others who did. But I'm not stupid. I was just bored and frustrated and feeling worthless.

I barely made it out of Watertown High School with a diploma. It didn't help that my friends around me were doing okay, that my sisters were good students, and that my father wanted to know whether I was going to college or not. By ninth grade I knew I wasn't going, and when I finally told my parents my decision, I felt bad about it. But I also knew in my heart that I would be miserable if I went. On top of that, I knew it would cost my parents a ton of money that would just end up being wasted in the end.

My mother and father weren't thrilled with my decision, but they ultimately were supportive. That was 1977. When I graduated from

high school, I wasn't quite sure what I wanted to do. I went to work in the Polaroid factory that was close to my hometown. It was monotonous, and I hated punching the clock and staring at the same people and sniffing the same smells every day. I needed more variety and soon landed a job working for Salvuchi Construction Company. I finally felt like I fit in. One of my first projects was helping to build Bentley College in Waltham, Massachusetts, and that's when I saw guys around me who were making great money, had cash to spend, and seemed happy.

I had grown up pretty spoiled, if not just plain lucky. I had everything I wanted, I wasn't used to going without or thinking about whether I had enough cash for dinner. But I had married very early and had a son, and I needed to support him. I wanted to give him what my parents had given me. So I spent about eighteen months working at the construction job and then went to work as a jack-of-all-trades for a local businessman, Sal Balsamo. I won't bore you with all of the details of that job—I did a little bit of everything from maintenance to errands—but I learned a lot from Sal. I didn't learn much about the trades, but I learned about life and about business. He was my first mentor, someone who inspired me to follow my dreams, take risks, and do what I wanted to do. "Every day you get out of bed is a gamble, Joey. You might as well go for it." Sal used to say that to me all the time. Now I've adopted his mantra as my own. I still repeat it a few times a week.

I knew I wanted to go for it, but it took me a while to figure out exactly what I was going after. I soon decided to start my own landscaping business. I didn't have a book to guide me and I didn't have many resources, but I decided I would figure it out as I went along. I started by going around to hair salons in affluent towns around Boston and hanging up fliers advertising my new business. "Will cut grass," my signs read. It was simple, without any fuss. I started to get a few calls.

That's all I needed. It was a start, and in the beginning I was using my old beat-up Toyota and stuffing it with my tools and lawn mower. I kept working for Sal, doing my landscaping jobs after work and on the weekends. It was hard work, but I liked it.

In 1980, when I was just twenty years old, the woman I had married way too early up and left. She wanted to be a model and took off, never to be seen again, leaving me with my son Anthony, who was just twenty-three months old at the time. I adored my son so much I barely let him out of my sight. I wanted to be the best father ever, but we were in a lousy situation. Having just started my business, I wasn't making much money yet. We were living in a small apartment that I named the Bug House since we were sharing our space with a large family of cockroaches.

I was also drinking a lot, which was how I dealt with all of the anger that had been building up over the years. The only reason I'm telling you this is to let you know that you can get through a lot and still come out on top. Even if the cards are stacked against you and it feels like you'll never get ahead, you will. If you are determined and ready to put in more than 100 percent, you can overcome all kinds of obstacles. Even though I had become an alcoholic, I was a highly functioning one, and within a few years, my business was doing really well. I'll get into some of the details later, but basically I had found my passion. I enjoyed working outside. I loved making people's lawns look beautiful, and I started adding additional services and employees to my operation.

Although my mom grew up very poor in Cambridge, Massachusetts, not far from where my father went to college, she, like my dad, had certainly hoped that I would get a degree after high school. I think it was especially hard for my father to realize that his son wasn't going to be the family lawyer or doctor. At first he tried hard through my high school years to push me to get better grades, and then one day he said,

“Joe, I wash my hands. Go ahead. Do what you want. Do what you want to do, but be the best.” I was so relieved that he saw that I wasn’t cut out for a career like his. But at the same time I still felt like a failure. My father also threw in one other piece of advice. “Be aggressive,” he said. It took me a while, but I’ve built an incredible reputation, a company with fourteen employees, and a booming business because I was determined to be the best I could be. And yes, I was aggressive about it.

I often think about my father saying, “Be the best.” That’s my advice to anyone who will listen. “Be the best.” And that is what *Blue Collar and Proud of It* is all about. Follow your *own* dreams and your *own* passions, and be the best you can possibly be. Life shouldn’t be about taking the easy road, nor should it be about doing as little as you can just to get by. This statement applies to absolutely everyone out there, whether you want to be a history teacher or a landscaper, whether you want to go to school to be an architect or go through an apprenticeship to become a welder.

I’ll be honest with you. I didn’t always give 100 percent. I hit some rough patches after high school, and it took me a few years to figure out that I was going to go into the landscaping business. But now, each morning when I get out of bed, I love knowing that I’m going off to give my customers 100 percent.

My landscaping customers are prominent doctors, lawyers, and professors. Newton, where my business is based, is teeming with Harvard graduates and innovative businesspeople. There are investment bankers and international consultants. They understand that they need a plumber to put in their new bathtub, an auto mechanic who will fix their car, and a landscaper who will make their yard shine. And guess what? I need my chiropractor and my daughter’s pediatrician and my tax accountant just as much as they need me.

What Is Best for You?

This book is about finding the right match for you and then tackling it with all that you've got. I knew I could never sit in an office. In my opinion, most people are not cut out to sit at a desk under fluorescent lights all day. Just the thought makes me itchy. A great percentage of us want to work with our hands, get dirty, be outside, be creative, or just fix stuff. We don't learn from a blackboard. Instead, we learn by trying and doing. We have to smell, touch, and feel. We learn the hands-on way, not in a classroom.

Those of us who work in the trades have immense pride. We are amazed by what we contribute to our communities, and we go home feeling that we've made a difference. This country was built by blue-collar workers, and it's going to be rebuilt and built up by blue-collar workers. We're not going away, and the work isn't going away either. You can't take your car to a call center in India to get it fixed, and you can't ship your kitchen sink overseas when it's leaking. Jobs in the building trades here can't be outsourced anywhere. And while many factory jobs are certainly being lost in the economic downturn that's taking place while this book is being written, a great many of the headline-making workforce cuts are taking place among white-collar workers.

Not Your Father's Assembly Line: Blue-Collar Goes High-Tech

Thanks to overwhelming advances in technology, blue-collar work is changing rapidly. Computerized auto body shops, high-tech construction equipment, and advanced lawn irrigation systems are what blue-collar workers are now handling on the job. Much of the work is cutting-edge, and that's why kids and twenty-somethings should feel

excited and proud about choosing the blue-collar path.

Mary Stanek Wehrheim is president of Stanek Tool Corporation near Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She often hosts open houses at her company's plant to show parents, teachers, and students what her tool-making operation is all about. The people who work for Stanek are well trained, highly skilled individuals using computers and advanced machinery. As she points out, no one wants to turn over multimillion-dollar equipment to people who earned all Ds in high school and have no training. "Many kids get into the trade after they've floundered for a while," says Stanek. The reason for the floundering is that blue-collar work was not presented initially as an acceptable choice. "After they've left school and gotten confused, parents can be more receptive," to a child's decision to learn a trade, she says. Isn't it a shame we couldn't make these choices available sooner? We should be able to skip over the step that sets up so many people to fail.

Opportunities are everywhere, but training and certification are a key component to success in these fields. As technology has taken off, and largely taken over, you need the skills and the know-how to run many of the machines, diagnostic equipment, and electronics that are involved. This is the new blue-collar world. In your grandparents' generation and even your parents' generation, people could often go straight from high school into many blue-collar jobs. While this move is still possible in some sectors, more likely you will need some type of postsecondary education—an apprenticeship, on-the-job training, or classes in a particular trade. You can't just waltz out of high school and into most of these jobs. In later chapters, we go into much more detail about exactly what type of training you need to land a job in many of these blue-collar fields.

**Success
in the Real
World**

Veronica Rose, one of New York's first female master electricians, now owns her own commercial and industrial electric company. She joined the electrical union back in the late 1970s, much to the surprise of her father, who said she'd never make it. "It's easier to raise a building than it is a family," says this mother of five children. It turns out that three of her kids were college material and two were not.

She sees her own work as something that can be admired. "The world is a better place because of what I've done," says Rose. "I've created something that has brought the United States, the town, the community to another level." And she's not shy when it comes to talking about the money you can make. "It's a better income than some of the college grads will ever attain their lifetime."

Changing Times

If you've been out of high school for a while or have been working for years in the white-collar world, it's never too late to make a change. It's not too late to step out of what you are doing and start something new. That doesn't mean it's not scary or difficult, but you can definitely take the plunge. I know the saying, "You can never teach an old dog new tricks," but when it comes to the trades, it's never too late to learn a new skill. You'll find that the unions are surprisingly open to older workers, and that age can often work to your benefit. Sometimes having years under your belt in the working world signals a really serious person who has put a lot of time and thought into making this transition. This book is going to provide you with ideas, resources, and encouragement.

My mother-in-law, Sandy O'Brien, always says, "If you don't reach for the stars you'll never grab one." You see, hoping to get a star won't do you much good. But being willing to work very hard to get the star you want is what this life is all about. Sandy went from being a crossing guard to a detective on the police force in her Massachusetts town. Such change and success take time and perseverance. If you want to be a master carpenter, it won't happen overnight. It will take hours and years of patience, of trying, of learning, and, yes, of occasionally failing. If you want to own your own plumbing business, you have to spend years building up a reputation and a list of customers. If you want to be a success, you have to be willing to put in the work.



**Did You
KNOW?**

In 1973, more than half of the workers on a factory floor in the United States had not finished high school. By 2001, one-third had training beyond high school.

Have you seen the National Geographic Channel's *Ice Road Trucker*? Or *L.A. Hard Hats*? What about *Deadliest Catch*? I'm hoping that because reality TV is shining a light on blue-collar jobs, more kids will want to go into the trades. Of all things, these reality television shows are capturing the nation's attention and highlighting some of America's most essential careers and hardest-working people.

Deadliest Catch is one of the most exhilarating shows I've seen. I'm always amazed to see the fishermen out in rough water, determined to bring in a boat full of crab or fish, no matter what. You'll actually get to meet one of the captains, Jerry Tilley, later in this book. These shows are bringing the realities of jobs straight into people's living rooms,

finally illuminating their importance as well as the training required to do them.

As I've said before, training is a crucial topic in this book and an essential part of success in the trades. Before you can go off and work, you need to know what type of training is needed. Many companies and industries offer apprenticeships. Some are earn-while-you-learn programs, which means you'd be getting paid while going through training. Some are courses offered through a community college or specialized trade school. We talk more about unions in the next chapter, but for now just know that most offer outstanding apprenticeships.

If you're still reading, I'm assuming you're interested in knowing and exploring more. In the next chapter, we talk about what it means to be blue collar and try to help you determine if this path is the right one for you. Then we delve into a host of possibilities and the training required for specific jobs. We look at women in the blue-collar sector and different opportunities available to them, and we also talk about green-collar jobs, found in environmentally friendly and sustainable sectors, that will be responsible for much job growth in this country and represent some of the hottest jobs of the future. We tell you about some of the amazing organizations and programs around the country that are working to put pride back into the blue-collar sector while encouraging men and women to enter the trades. And we introduce some of the neatest people out there, men and women who are passionate about their jobs and proud to be part of the blue-collar workforce.

Stick with me, and I promise to tell you all you've ever wanted to know about getting ahead in this world while finding success outside the cubicle.

Chapter 2

What Is *Blue Collar*, Anyway?

Have you ever stopped to think about the term *blue collar*? To me, *blue collar* means skilled individuals who make the world go around. We're talking about people who are there to fix the plumbing, the leaks, and the wiring when it's broken. These same blue-collar people build skyscrapers, work as freight train conductors, and perform myriad other important jobs. Unfortunately, the term *blue collar* sometimes has a negative connotation, one that makes some people think of a person who didn't work hard enough to get a college education. We need to rethink this attitude.

The actual term *blue collar* came into everyday use in the United States around 1950 and referred to the uniforms traditionally worn in factories and other industrial work sites. You've probably seen the exact

clothing I'm talking about: the durable clothes that won't tear easily and can withstand dirt and grime and grease. These blue collars were worn by plumbers, auto technicians, and service people, and while these traditional blue-collar uniforms are not obsolete, you see them a bit less nowadays. Some of you might even recognize this look since it's cropped up as fashionable retro clothing.

But beyond the color of the shirt collar, *blue collar* came to mean a certain type of worker, one who wasn't *white collar*, which basically meant an office worker or someone working in one of the professions. Blue-collar workers were traditionally paid hourly, although that's not always the case now, and many blue-collar workers are union members. *Blue collar* even came to mean a way of life. It has long defined people who don't sit in an office all day, or sit in front of a computer, with the same routine. It means a person who was often outside, in the field, or means in a shop working with his or her hands, fixing something, rebuilding a part, or operating machinery. To me, it means someone who is always looking to keep moving, doing, making, or breaking.

Traditionally, the federal government has classified all workers in the United States according to whether they were white collar, blue collar, or service workers. Chefs, police, and firefighters were grouped together as service workers, for example. But the Bureau of Labor Statistics, which tracks all these nifty jobs and counts the number of workers and the salaries in each industry, recently stopped categorizing jobs according to collar color. Apparently this approach was offending some people. It doesn't offend me, and I hope it doesn't offend you. I've said it before and you will hear me say it again: I am proud to be blue collar. But the fact is that not all jobs fit perfectly into one category anymore.

Maybe you don't even think of yourself as *blue collar*. Perhaps you use the term *tradesperson*. That's fine, too. Whatever label you apply to

yourself, the point is that the non-white-collar workforce is a crucial piece of the puzzle. We are the people who like to build, scrape, hammer, carry, dig, and put our hands to use. The idea of sitting at a desk staring at a computer screen sickens us. Thinking about it makes me want to jump out of a window, actually. You see, we don't mind getting dirty, although not all of us will. But none of us are heading off to work in ironed pants and starched shirts, carrying briefcases.

The biggest change—and it's huge—in the blue-collar workforce in the past generation is that you need to be more skilled to land a job and to get ahead than fifteen, twenty, or thirty years ago. Technology is taking over, even in the blue-collar world. Every industry has been affected. Every industry has incorporated technology into its manufacturing, building processes, and overall functioning. Jobs are simply more technical than they used to be. Installing a solar panel requires training, repairing a car often involves intricate and complicated computers, and much construction work is driven by sophisticated machinery.

**Did You
KNOW?**

Have you heard the term *green collar*? The term is used to refer to careers that focus on blue-collar jobs in environmentally related careers. Green-collar jobs combine blue-collar work with green industries, and many are in the alternative energy sectors. Organic farming, sustainable fishing, and eco-friendly landscaping are all green-collar jobs. We talk in much more detail about these opportunities in Chapter 5.

In the next chapter, we give you a lot of specifics on what it takes to get started in a blue-collar job. We'll tell you a ton about what skills and disposition you need to go into a variety of jobs, and we'll go through

the type of training, or preparation, you need to become successful. While we're hoping this book will put you well on your way to a successful blue-collar career, we can't guide you through every job out there. Instead we've focused on the most popular, the most lucrative, and the ones with the most projected growth. That said, we haven't included in our discussion hundreds of other blue-collar jobs .

But just to get you thinking, the blue-collar jobs I am talking about include—but are in no way limited to—plumber, logger, tool-and-die maker, shipbuilder, carpenter, electrician, forklift operator, truck driver, landscaper, mason, miner, fisher, bus driver, fabricator, auto technician, fence installer, septic builder, carpet installer, trucker, tile setter, railroad conductor, construction worker, truck driver, and air conditioner installer. I could go on for a long time, but I'm sure you get the picture. A lot of jobs are out there, but how do you figure out which one is right for you? How do you know if you are blue collar or are meant to be blue collar, or if you just want a blue-collar job? I can try to help.

I'm sure you've been asked, "So, what do you want to be?" or "What do you want to do with your life?" These questions can be frustrating, and they used to drive me crazy, especially when I was a senior in high school. If you don't know the answer, it's really okay, and even if you think you know, you may end up changing your mind. Answering the question is even harder for those of you in schools that don't offer career and technical education (CTE) classes. Thinking about your future work is tough if you've never had a chance to try auto mechanics, take a woodworking class, or test your skills at landscaping.

"Don't be afraid to jump around at first," says Joe Ross, a sheet metal contractor and owner of Ross Air Systems in Pickering, Ontario. "Try to find a trade that you are happy in." Ross says people who are just starting out in the trades may find that the field they initially started in

isn't the one where they are going to settle. "You may have to change some to find what you want." Ross was fortunate that he knew what he wanted to do. He followed his father into the sheet metal industry. He had always worked with tools and cars while growing up, and he knew that he wanted to keep working with his hands.

Ross spent six years working through his apprenticeship and then worked in someone else's business for about seven years before deciding to open his own. He knew the trade well and didn't want to have a boss. At this point, Ross, who is in his early fifties, spends more of his time working with clients, landing business, and doing customer service. It's something he really enjoys. But Ross is one of those skilled trades company owners who is always happy to help out an aspiring tradesperson. He says more youth should go knock on doors, show curiosity, and ask for internships or job shadowing opportunities.

He's right. You can't just expect to waltz out of high school and start making a high salary. You have to earn it and learn the trade and get to the top with hard work. Ross suggests offering to work for free for two weeks. If you want to be a plumber or electrician or are curious about the sheet metal industry, Ross suggests begging for an unpaid job. Prove yourself and demonstrate that you are hungry to learn. The employer has nothing to lose, and you may get a great mini-introduction to a certain trade.

The Role of Unions

Unions are a crucial component of the skilled trade workforce and one of the best ways into the blue-collar industries. There are approximately 15.4 million union members in the United States and about 4.5 million in Canada. Joining a union often means that you will receive, at no cost, industry-specific training, apprenticeships, assistance landing

a job, and continuing education. Unions are most well known for advocating on behalf of their members for higher or more equitable wages and benefits. They become your resource for support with contract negotiations and camaraderie among colleagues. Studies show that union workers earn, on average, 28 percent more than nonunion workers, and they are more likely to receive healthcare and pension benefits.

“Most people think of them as a place to get a job,” says David Borrus, about unions. He is the business representative for the Pile Drivers Local 56 in Boston. As Borrus explains it, a large amount of his job is “selling knowledge and skills” to contractors looking to hire workers. These skills come from the apprenticeships that Borrus touts as the best aspect of union membership. Membership dues are what pay for the apprenticeship programs, which are in turn free for you. “We have a lot of money,” says Borrus, who is a welder and commercial diver. “You can really buy state-of-the-art equipment.” The unions are training people to be the cream of the crop, the best possible tradespeople out there. “We put a lot into training our next generation.”

Unions are also in a position to know and hire the best tradespeople in the field, so the most skilled workers are typically the ones training the apprentices. “Apprenticeships are the future,” says Borrus. For example, Borrus explains that apprentices are usually eased into jobs, with plenty of mentoring and coaching. They are around colleagues who have been in the field for awhile and can offer support. They won’t ever be thrown into a job without the proper training. “It’s not just a school,” says Borrus. “There is a whole system of formal and informal mentoring going on.” While trade schools are not necessarily bad places to get an education, they won’t provide the mentoring or coaching available through unions. Borrus adds that once you graduate from one of these schools, you are typically on your own when it comes to finding a job.

For years, the unions had a reputation for being an old-boy network and one that was nearly impossible to get into if you didn't know someone who was already a member. "That father-son local has gone by the wayside," says Borrus. "The vast majority of our apprentices don't have a family member in the trades." Marco Frausto, the president and business agent of Ironworkers Local #416 in Los Angeles, agrees. He says the old-school attitudes have largely changed. "Now, it's more open," he says. You don't have to have connections on the inside. But you do need to be professional, demonstrate that you want to work hard, and make a good impression. Plus, the tests required to get into the unions prevent unqualified kids who have connections from gaining automatic membership.

Frausto explains that you don't need experience to apply with a union. Rather, the union is where you get the experience and training you need. "We teach you to be an ironworker," he says of his union. "We can make anybody an ironworker." When asked what skills someone should have before applying, he says that's not the most important factor. As with most unions, you mainly need to be willing to work hard and demonstrate an interest in the work. Borrus admits there are some applicants he tends to weed out. "We're not crazy about cowboy types," he explains.

Frausto, who is thirty-three and joined Local #416 more than thirteen years ago, points out that unions are integral to preserving sustainable wages. "We protect the middle class," he says. "We can't build a rich nation on the backs of poor people." That's where the union steps in. He points out that nonunion workers have to bargain their wages from job to job, whereas there are preset pay scales within unions. "It's a way to protect the worker," he explains, adding that other union benefits include health care and pensions. He also points out

that unions are to thank for having created the familiar 9:00 to 5:00, eight-hour workday, which means employees can't be expected to work endless hours. "I love the trade. I love the fellowship. I love the work," says Frausto. "We've built America from coast to coast."

There are currently forty-four thousand electrical apprentices in the United States that are learning through a combined program of on-the-job training and classroom work. The industry expects this number to increase to close to 50,000 in the next several years, said Michael Callanan, the executive director of the National Joint Apprenticeship and Training Committee (NJATC). The NJATC is a joint program run by the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers and the National Electrical Contractors Association. Callanan says participants work eight thousand hours alongside a trained craftsman and spend classroom time learning theoretical approaches to wiring and electrical codes. "I can't imagine a better scenario." Once the paid training programs end, apprentices have a built-in job network.

"We've suffered under the mantra that if you don't go to college you won't be successful," says Callanan. He says the electrical industry has to work harder to demonstrate the benefits of the trade, from high wages to the specialized skills that it takes to become certified. "We haven't done a good enough job explaining to parents and guidance counselors what the trades are about," he adds. "The skill is something that can never be taken away." Plus, Callanan says that the combination of workforce shortages and the rising costs of college tuition may lead parents to see the trades as a desirable option for their children. Callanan says that throughout all of the blue-collar sectors, unions offer an unparalleled opportunity to learn, to earn, and to launch a career. "This is an opportunity to have a career, not a job," he says.

**Success
in the Real
World**

Blacksmithing Became His Passion

Robb Martin knew what he wanted to do with his life as soon as he heard about blacksmithing. As a kid, Martin, who goes by “Thak,” was always building things, working with his hands, and he enjoyed creating, drawing, and sculpting. So when he learned about blacksmithing, the original metal craft, he was enthralled. He thought blacksmiths just made shoes for horses and was intrigued to see the many different applications of the trade.

The artistic, creative side of blacksmithing is definitely what appealed most to Martin, who is now forty. By the age of fourteen, Martin says he knew he wasn’t going to college. He practically begged for a job at a blacksmith shop in Floradale, Ontario, near where he grew up. He started off by merely sweeping the floors, for minimum wage, and started to learn the craft from the blacksmithing couple who ran the shop.

Martin also became interested in medieval reenactments and took on a character. His is “Thak,” and he’s been going by that for years. Most of Martin’s work in his own blacksmithing shop now includes fantasy or medieval-inspired designs. He does a lot of ornamental work for clients who are looking to create unique pieces for their home.

Martin has been struck by how many people take pride in visiting a local artisan and craftsman who is creating something that will last hundreds of years. In what Martin calls a “throwaway culture,” he sees clients who “want something with quality and personality.” That’s exactly what he delivers.

Although Martin has done well pursuing the creative side of blacksmithing, he said it’s essential for anyone interested in the trade to learn the basics and the fundamentals and go from there. He says it’s a

wonderful career option for someone who has both a creative side and a willingness to work hard and pay their dues. “You need a good strong work ethic,” he adds.

Having grown up on a farm, Martin was used to the hard work, so that was never a problem for him as he was learning the blacksmithing trade. There aren’t many blacksmithing courses in North America—in fact, Martin teaches one of them—but someone willing to do research can find a few in Canada and the United States.

It’s the primal, back-to-basics elements of blacksmithing that most appeal to Martin. That, plus the creativity and the fact that he couldn’t be happier. “With some raw muscle power and some passion, you can create some amazing things.”

The Service Sector

I mentioned earlier that the government stopped classifying jobs as *white collar* and *blue collar*. But the classification *service sector* still largely applies to jobs such as law enforcement, firefighters, chefs, and nurses. Cops and firefighters have historically been considered blue collar, and quite literally police officers typically wear dark-blue-collared shirts as part of their uniform. But over the past decade or so, law enforcement jobs have become extremely sophisticated as security concerns and needs have intensified. Training is rigorous, and college degrees are often required to join a police department. Many police officers continue their education to get a master’s or additional training in criminal justice, terrorism prevention, or other specialties. Firefighters also face rigorous testing processes, and more and more departments are requiring college degrees. The same goes for chefs,

many of whom graduate from culinary school. Some attend these culinary institutes after earning a four-year college degree.

Frankly, there are a ton of guides and resources available to anyone interested in pursuing a career as a police officer, firefighter, chef, or nurse. Therefore, we aren't going to tackle these in this book, but I did want to mention them since many people have historically thought of these jobs as blue collar. These are all incredible jobs, but if you want to go into one of these fields you won't have trouble finding much in the way of guidance, books, and support.

It's Never Too Late

I've met a lot of people who thought they had figured out a career for life in the white-collar world only to discover years into whatever they were doing that they wanted a change. Going from the white-collar world to a blue-collar job is certainly a major adjustment, but for many of the people we talked to, it's the best thing they've ever done. And really, it's never too late to start something new.

Robson Tyrer made a seemingly drastic leap when he went from professor to plumber in 1976. He was fed up with academia, didn't see a stable professional future, and decided to try his hand at something else. He wasn't even particularly mechanical. He had graduated from Princeton eleven years earlier where he majored in history. The son of physicians, Tyrer calls his move a "radical departure"; he decided to trade in the world of professorships (he was teaching Mexican history at San Francisco State at the time) for that of plumbing. "I left the academic world without any serious regrets," says the sixty-five-year-old ex-academic.

"Plumbing was entirely by accident," explains Tyrer, an Oakland, California, resident who spent seven years in a three-man plumbing

partnership. He started tagging along with a self-taught friend and then the rest fell into place. Twenty-five years ago he started his own business, Mallard Plumbing, and now has eight employees who work with him. “As a plumber you are relating to people about issues that matter to them,” he says. Tyrer found that while academia was incredibly interesting, there was no immediate relevancy.

But with plumbing, Tyrer says, “You are providing a very important service and one that is often linked to a real, time-sensitive need. These are bread-and-butter issues.” During the 1970s, Tyrer says there were many people in the Bay Area leaving academic life to go into the trades, so having a plumber or an electrician with a Ph.D. wasn’t as much of a shock as it might be in other parts of the country. Plus, the business has been lucrative. “Plumbing has been good to me,” he adds. “I would never discourage anyone from going into the trades,” says Tyrer, whose own son is a plumbing contractor in Denver.



Success in the Real World

When Older Is Better

Veronica Rose has been fibbing about her age for a long time. Unlike most people she tends to say she’s older, not younger, than she actually is. This master electrician from Long Island, New York, is forty-eight but for years has been saying she’s fifty. And when she was in her midtwenties she called herself a thirty-something. Rose knows that’s not the norm, especially in white-collar America where age sometimes means you’ll be edged out by a young, flashy new hire. “In the trades, it’s different. Wisdom and age are valued,” she says. “Age commands respect because of the wisdom and acquired knowledge.”

Glenda Campbell was fifty-five when she decided to leave her job in the drafting department of a large company to become a truck driver. She had been working at the same place for twelve years, but when the company was bought out she lost her position. It's a familiar story. She could have gone looking for a similar job in a similar cubicle, but really she thought it was a good opportunity for a change.

Her twenty-one-year-old daughter had always wanted to go into trucking, so Campbell thought about it and decided she would give it a try as well. The two women went to trucking school together, which included a five-week training program that combined in-class and on-the-road preparation. They send an experienced trucker and trainer out with you for a few weeks, and then you're on your own. (Turns out with a young baby at home Campbell's daughter didn't want to stick with it.)

"I always liked driving, and I needed to do something to make money," says this grandmother and great-grandmother. "I enjoy it," she says. "Most truck drivers like the freedom. You don't have someone hanging over your shoulder." Divorced with no young children at home, Campbell, who is now fifty-nine, leaves her home in Florida for about two weeks at a time and then she has several days at home before setting out again. She's been driving for Schneider National for about five years, and she doesn't miss the office at all. On the road, Campbell gets to see a bit of the country, and if she's stopped long enough she takes time to do some exploring. Thanks to her long gray hair, Campbell says most of the male truckers she encounters just assume that she's a long-time driver and never give her grief for being a female.

Finding What Is Right for You

Just because you're interested in blue-collar work doesn't mean that every blue-collar job is the one for you. You have to figure out what is right for you, not for your mom, not for your dad, and not for your teacher or guidance counselor.

In the next chapter, we get more specific about different professions—what it means to become a logger, welder, landscaper, construction worker, and more. We'll walk you through what work you do in each of these industries and others. But before we get there, this next section is meant to help you identify your own traits or characteristics, likes or dislikes, that may be either well matched with certain jobs or surefire signs to stay away from others.

While reading through the next few pages, I recommend that you get out some paper and a pen. Write down what you like to do. What puts you in a good mood? What are you willing to work hard at doing? What are you good at doing? What is your strongest skill? These are questions that may help you start to formulate the preferences you have about jobs. Did you have a summer job that you hated? Why? What was it that didn't work for you? Maybe you are working part time, on the weekends right now, and really enjoying the work. Jot down what it is exactly that you like. The people? The money? The job sites? The skills you need to do the work? What appeals to you may not appeal to someone else, and what I like to do may be the last thing you'd enjoy doing for a job.

Here are some questions to get you thinking:

Do you like to be outside?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Do you mind getting dirty?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Do you enjoy interacting with people?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Are you creative?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Do you get seasick?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Do you prefer to follow plans and instructions, or do you prefer to work more freely?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Are you willing to move to a different part of the country?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Do you mind seasonal climate changes?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Do you prefer to work with machines rather than in the dirt or do you enjoy getting your hands dirty?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Are heavy machines something you'd enjoy using?		
Do you prefer to use your hands and muscles rather than rely on machines?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Do you prefer a combination of machine-assisted and manual work?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Do you have a fear of heights?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Do very high temperatures make you nervous?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Do you enjoy using tools?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Do you like to work alone as opposed to being on a team?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Do you mind being away from home for long periods of time?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Do you have to actually be active, as opposed to sitting long periods of time, behind the wheel of a truck, perhaps?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Do you have any physical limitations?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No

Some of these questions might sound strange to you, but there is a reason for my asking each one. It's really important that you plan and think ahead. You can't just decide you want to be a fisherman if you've never been on a boat or if you get seasick each time you go out. If you hate heights, you may not make the best painter and certainly you'd have to rethink welding on skyscrapers, but that doesn't mean you'd have to forgo welding altogether. If you don't like to be dirty and you don't mind being away from home for long stretches, truck driving could be a great thing for you. If you love math and are anal about measurements and enjoy working with your hands, carpentry could be a possibility for you. Do you love doing physical work? There is plenty of it out there, including logging, construction, and landscaping. Do you prefer to work alone or with a few people in a quieter environment and you love tinkering with wires? Ever thought about being a residential electrician? Do you see why I'm asking you all of these questions?

If you know that you'd hate being behind a desk every day, all day, and if you know that you'd like to be outside working or have a job that requires being physical, you've come to the right place. Do you like to get your hands into something? Do you enjoy the feeling of gripping tools and using them to make things? Just the way some people get a high from running (I don't), others get a high from working outside and sweating as part of their job (I do).

And while it is important to plan and it is important to give all that you've got to whatever you choose to do, you don't have to commit to it for life. If you think you want to be a mason now, it's okay if you end up deciding it's not for you at some point down the road. Many of these jobs have overlapping skills and sensibilities. If you decide to go into construction, you may stick with it for your whole life, or maybe you'll find a specific skill that you're excited to master. The next thing you

know you could be working toward mastering carpentry or operating heavy machinery.

Hopefully you have a technical or vocational program at your school or nearby. Maybe you've taken an automotive class or a woodworking course, but many of you won't have had that opportunity. I've always called this *shop* and *vo-tech*, but now it's referred to as *career and technical education*, or *CTE*. In many school districts, those are some of the first programs to go when budgets are cut. In some areas of the country, the CTE courses are being reinstated in full force, specialized technical high schools are opening, and teens are getting the chance to experience these trades like never before. If you have had some vocational training in your school, you may be able to answer some of these questions easily. Have you enjoyed your woodworking courses? Metalsmith classes?

Unfortunately, not everyone is offered the opportunity to take CTE courses, and if you're one of those people who hasn't been exposed to the trades, you'll have to work extra hard to figure out what you want to do. I suggest finding a summer job or part-time job on the weekends with a local contractor in a field that interests you. If you can't test the waters in high school, you'll have to test them on your own. Some of you have to start from the beginning and figure out what it is you like and don't like. If you haven't had CTE courses or opportunities at the high school level, you may really be left wondering how you can possibly know if this is the path for you. I suggest getting out there and getting a job, an internship, or an apprenticeship. Knock on doors, make phone calls, and show that you are interested and hardworking. If you really love to tinker with your own car and have always wanted to be an auto mechanic, then go to your local dealership and ask if there are any part-time, weekend jobs available. Maybe you'll hate it, and maybe you'll find that you love it.

If you are a mom or dad, aunt or uncle, teacher or guidance counselor, you may be wondering how to tell if your son, daughter, or student is destined for the blue-collar workforce. Sure, they may have told you that they think they are, but maybe they haven't even figured that part out yet. There are no hard-and-fast rules about what makes someone cut out for a blue-collar job. I've spent a long time thinking about the traits that many of us blue-collar workers share in common. Maybe you've noticed these in your niece or seen some of these signs in your son. This isn't based on a scientific study, but I can tell you that the following are traits I've found in most blue-collar workers: we're very active, we like to fix and build things, we're creative, some of us have attention deficit disorder (ADD), we can be stubborn, some of us are fearless, and we can be risk takers. We act out and get very agitated in school, some of us act out at our teachers. Does your kid have what I call the blue-collar personality? It's just something to consider.

When I was in high school, I took shop and woodworking. I started to develop this blue-collar personality in my early teens. I liked shop. I liked it better than English class, which I could just never get into. When I started working for a construction company after high school, I realized just how much I enjoyed being outside. I had an easier time focusing than I did when I was at a desk, and I enjoyed the physical work. Other than some seasonal allergies, which I eventually outgrew, it was great to spend my summer days in the grass. During the winter I was shoveling sidewalks and plowing. I enjoyed that I was always moving around. I have a hard time sitting still and needed the variety. I liked meeting different clients and knowing that each job offered its own challenges.

I knew that I wanted to be outside. I knew that I couldn't be in a factory. Some people can. The idea of building something and completing

one piece of the puzzle on a factory floor is very rewarding. But for me, I needed to be outside and I needed to be moving around a lot. It's hard for me to sit still and it's hard for me to stand in one place or focus on one thing. I know welders need to have total concentration, honing in on what they're doing without moving, lest they get burned, or fall or lose their place. But with landscaping I am always on the move, whether driving between jobs or out of my truck racing around yards, always with different equipment. This suits me. I love it. But it's not for everyone. That's just the point. Not everyone is cut out to eat the same things, to listen to the same music, or to do the same jobs.

Chapter 3

Show Me My Options!

The A-Z Guide to Becoming a . . .

Now that you're thinking about your own skills and passions, I want to introduce you to what I think are some of the most interesting and challenging jobs out there. This chapter is designed to help you better understand how you can go about getting your blue-collar credentials. We'll first walk you through what each of these blue-collar jobs or industries entail, while trying to give you the nitty-gritty on what it means to be a carpenter or trucker, for example. We'll tell you what kind of training you need for these jobs and what the job market is expected to look like between now and 2016. We'll also give you a sense of how much money you can make. This is by no means a list of every single job out there, but what you'll find below is a list of twenty

of the more popular, interesting, or, simply put, higher-paying blue-collar careers.

We'll answer some commonly asked questions about these trades: What is required to get these jobs? How do I get trained? Where do I start? How much can I make? We have not listed every job since there are just so many—from painter, electrician, landscaper, logger, and fabricator to heavy equipment operator, mason, cement layer, miner, and trucker. The list is nearly endless. I encourage you to use the Internet as a research tool. If you're interested in an industry, poke around online and check out some of the blogs and industry association websites for more. A wealth of information is out there. I hope you will do your own research as well, especially if you don't find anything below that appeals to you, but we're definitely going to get you started.

A lot of our information, facts, and figures come from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). They have a comprehensive list of job descriptions, training requirements, and even salary scales for every type of job registered by the Bureau of Labor. We relied heavily on the BLS's Occupational Handbook to help guide you through some of the opportunities that are available. You can access much of this information from www.bls.gov and while I haven't attributed every section to BLS, we use this resource to get many of the basics and most of the data.

As you go through this chapter and read about the various opportunities out there, think back to the last chapter and to all of the questions you answered about your own skills and personal preferences. I guarantee some of your traits will match up with what is required of the jobs in this chapter. Be on the lookout for things that interest you, appeal to you, or even totally turn you off as you read through this material. After all, narrowing down your list of options can be a good thing, too.

You'll see from what you're about to read that most—although not

all—of these jobs do require postsecondary training or apprenticeships, and some of the industries that don't require it will highly recommend it. It's a way to get ahead, to become better prepared, and to join the group of skilled workers who are at an advantage when looking for a job. For many entry-level jobs, such as construction laborers, you really don't need any additional schooling, but you do need a willingness to work hard and a desire to learn. You may find a few months or years down the road that you want to work at a more advanced job. You may want to have a specialty or advance as far as you can in one of the trades. An entry-level job is an excellent way to get a front-row seat so that you can experience the many different options out there. But you can't stay in that first job forever, so keep that in mind.

I've said this before, but to find success and ultimately fulfillment, you need to go out there and be the best you can be. The best isn't going to mean staying in the same position for your whole life. Challenge yourself, develop more skills, become more valuable to your employer, and invest in yourself. If you do, you will be investing in your future. I encourage you to think about your short-term plan and long-term goals. Many of these entry-level positions are outstanding places to be in the short term; they provide an opportunity to test the waters, to learn, and to earn money. But don't get stuck in the same position forever. Do start thinking about where each of these positions can take you in the long run.

The only piece that's missing from this chapter is a list of the postsecondary programs, apprenticeships, and schools that will offer the training you need in each of these industries. We haven't forgotten that. We've included all of this information (really a gigantic list) in Chapter 11. Everything is organized alphabetically by industry and then alphabetically again by state. We haven't included every single industry, and we haven't included every single program or school or apprenticeship, but

again, we wanted to help you get started. You'll find programs for the twenty-one industries listed below, and you'll have a great start on thinking about what you need for your own blue-collar credentials.

Success takes time, dedication, and patience. You have to work your way into a field or skill. Becoming a water treatment plant supervisor does not happen overnight. You need to learn the ropes and understand how all of the systems work, and you have to have experience managing an emergency, such as a burst pipeline, before you can be the one in charge. If your dream job is running a large landscaping business, you have to start at the bottom. That's what I did. For many years it was just me and a car full of equipment. Along the way, I learned and I made some mistakes, and each year I understood my customers, my trade, and my skills better.

In this chapter, you will also meet some other individuals who have successful careers in these trades. Some fell into their jobs by accident, others planned their path from early on, and all are passionate about what they do. They are hardworking as well as dedicated to helping others, like you, find their way. Many of them felt stupid in school or had a hard time telling their families that they wanted to go blue collar. All of them, though, have exciting, fulfilling careers, and none of them regret the decision to follow their passion. Be sure to read about these folks along the way.

Remember, this book is not about how to be the average you; it's about how to be the best you. It is about being the best you can possibly be. I would challenge you to look at the median salaries as a starting point, not an ending point. We can all do a little to get by, but it takes someone special to do a lot, to go over the top, to be the best at what they are doing. If you're taking the time to figure out what you want to do, what makes you tick, what gets you excited, and what you're willing to get out of bed for in the morning, then make sure you're prepared to give it 150 percent.

I hope you're starting to feel inspired to climb to the top of an industry, a company, or a skill level.



**Success
in the Real
World**

You Can't Join a Baseball Team

Craig Copeland enjoys his job, but he says the sporadic hours prevent him from joining a baseball team. A salary close to \$100,000 makes it well worth the sacrifice. Copeland has worked as a bed truck operator, moving drilling rigs, and is now a dispatch operator for DC Energy Services in Crossfield, Alberta. He used to go to and from drilling sites around Alberta that required equipment deliveries or removal. "This is not a 9-to-5 job," says Copeland, explaining that an entire operation could be held up while waiting for one of his trucks to arrive.

Precision is everything in this job, says Copeland, who explains that the sometimes-eighty-thousand-pound equipment must be loaded within an inch of specification to ensure proper and safe hauling. "You feel good when you get it right." Copeland always enjoyed driving the huge rigs and appreciated the challenge in driving across rugged terrain. He says he wouldn't have enjoyed the long-haul trucking and endless open roads. He's always liked that his job didn't involve sitting in front of a computer all day, though it can involve physical labor.

Copeland says that recent workforce shortages have driven down the expertise of operators, something that he finds disappointing. He says people are promoted fairly quickly in this industry now, which is good for people getting into it, but Copeland would like to see more training. Copeland was trained by his employer and says that's the way people typically learn the industry.

Some days I wish I could try all of the jobs we talk about in this chapter. And with the way things are changing in the American workforce, I am envious of all of you who are thinking about one of these careers. This country needs enthusiastic, hardworking, trained people, and it is an exciting time to be going into the blue-collar world of work.

AUTOMOTIVE TECHNICIAN

Gone are the days of the grease monkeys who were able to tinker under the hood of a car without any training or certification. As technology has advanced, so, too, have the cars and their many moving parts. Being able to master these changes as well as stay on top of the hybrids, electric cars, and alternative-fuel sources for cars (ever heard of running a car on cooking oil?) will help you in the long run. Who knows where all of these changes will lead the industry ultimately, but one thing is for sure: things are changing rapidly, and technicians must be prepared to keep up. The more training you have in alternative cars, the better your chances for success in the future.

Not only are many car manufacturers complete sticklers for how well their mechanics are trained, some prefer to train their employees themselves. Most of the major car manufacturers, such as BMW, Ford, and Toyota, have outstanding training programs that provide specific manufacturing certification and paid positions after program completion.

▣▣▣▣ The Work

As you may know, cars now roll out of the factory with their own computers onboard, which means more parts to break, but really, dif-

ferent parts that need servicing. In other words, this is not your grandfather's automobile. From the dashboard to the computerized antilock brake systems, there are dozens of electrical and technical components. They positively confuse me. But for a technician they open a whole new world of automotive repair. Diagnostics, computers, and troubleshooting are all key to this industry.

Technicians inspect, maintain, and repair automobiles. The increased sophistication of automobiles requires workers who can use computerized shop equipment and electronic components and still maneuver around a car's engine with basic hand tools. Automotive service technicians must be able to adapt to the constantly changing technology, and they must be detail oriented and precise in their calculations and diagnostic skills. Small parts and tiny errors can create massive problems. Technicians use a variety of tools from pneumatic wrenches to flame-cutting equipment, necessary to remove exhaust systems. High-tech tools are needed to fix the computer equipment that operates everything from the engine to the brakes and transmission.

Having physical science and math classes under your belt is considered a good thing. If you are interested in the green aspect of the automotive industry, hybrid cars add a whole other dimension to the work. Being able to service a variety of cars such as diesel, hybrids, and even electric ones will be seen as a benefit. In the next decade, technicians will need to be familiar with alternative-fuel vehicles; their job security will improve as their skills become more advanced.

▣▶ Work Environment

Generally, service technicians work indoors in repair shops; however, some shops can be drafty and noisy. Some technicians work outside or at least in bays that open to the outdoors. Although many problems can be

fixed with simple computerized adjustments, technicians still frequently work with dirty, greasy parts, and in awkward positions.

▣▣▣▣► Education and Training

Most employers view vocational training programs in automotive service technology as the best preparation for trainee positions. High school programs are a great way to start training or to test the waters to see if this is something you have a knack for and enjoy. But these days, high school programs alone are not enough, and most employers require additional training. The highly regarded Automotive Youth Education Service (AYES) is a partnership between high school automotive repair programs and the automotive manufacturers' dealers. Students who complete these programs are prepared to take on entry-level technician positions or to go on to advanced technical education courses. Generally, courses in automotive repair, electronics, physics, chemistry, English, computers, and mathematics provide a good educational background for a career as an auto technician.

Postsecondary training programs in this industry usually provide intensive career preparation through a combination of classroom instruction and hands-on practice. Some trade and technical school programs provide concentrated training for six months to a year. Community college programs usually award a certificate or an associate's degree. Various automobile manufacturers and participating franchised dealers also sponsor two-year associate's degree programs across the country. Students in these programs typically spend two to three months at a time attending classes and then work in the service departments of participating dealers.

**Blue
Collar in
ACTION****A New Generation of Auto Technicians**

“Most kids don’t grow up working on their own cars,” says Vince Williams, who is a training and development specialist with General Motors. Auto mechanic wannabes must have more skills than ever before, and the ones whom Williams is looking for may seem surprising at first. He says he wants apprentices who have good reasoning and problem-solving skills. “I’m looking for a high-level thinker,” he adds.

Williams works with GM’s Automotive Service Educational Program (ASEP), which is a partnership between dealers, schools, and students. ASEP participants alternate between classes and hands-on technician work. Upon completion of the program, graduates are placed with dealerships. Williams says students can learn the technical and mechanical aspects of the job all through ASEP. But he’s especially interested in recruiting students who have an innate sense of how to problem solve. “The more successful people, they get a hold of a problem and follow it through to solve that problem,” says Williams. “You have to have that conquer attitude.”

The ASEP program has a partnership with sixty-four schools around the country and graduates approximately 800 students each year. The cost to enroll is about \$5,000 when all is said and done, but Williams points out that this is a small and beneficial investment considering earning potential following graduation. Because successful participants are placed with dealerships, jobs are close to guaranteed. And Williams says he knows of graduates who are making more than \$70,000 after just a few years on the job. “You can make a really good living,” he says.

As car technology has progressed, so have the training tools. GM now

offers some of its coursework and training through iPods, the Internet, and other media. Williams says another benefit to the ASEP training is that it provides graduates with a portable skill. "No matter where you go in the country, there is a need for auto mechanics."

The National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) has become a standard credential for automotive service technicians, and a certificate is important for those wishing to pursue a career in this field. While not mandatory for work in automotive service, certification is common for all non-entry-level technicians in most areas of the country. You can check with a local service center to find out more about what is expected in your area. Certification is granted in eight different areas of automotive service including electrical systems, engine repair, brake systems, suspension and steering, and heating and air conditioning. To become a Master Automobile Technician, you must be certified in all eight areas. This master certificate is worth considering for future growth. As with most occupations, the more you know and the more you've mastered, the more valuable and employable you become.

Employers increasingly send experienced automotive service technicians to manufacturer training centers to learn to repair newer car models or to receive special training in the repair of specific components, such as electronics, fuel injection, or air conditioners.

▣▣▣▣► The Numbers

Automotive technicians and mechanics held about 773,000 jobs in 2006, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Jobs are expected to increase by 14 percent between 2006 and 2016, which means an

additional 110,000 positions. The median hourly wage for technicians was \$16.24, with the highest-paid people earning approximately \$27.22 per hour. Technicians working at dealerships may also receive a commission based on their work volume, and those who are union members tend to have better compensation packages than their nonunion counterparts.

CARPENTRY

Many of you have probably tinkered with carpentry at home. *This Old House* and the presence of Home Depots all around the country have made carpentry and remodeling accessible to everyone, and while many of us are capable of building a small deck or making repairs around the house, a professional carpenter is a master with measurements, wood types, design, and construction.

Being a carpenter involves everything from framing a house to hand-crafting furniture and building bridges. Building something gives you an amazing feeling, and carpenters have job satisfaction in small and large proportions depending on their project. While people might specialize in industrial or residential carpentry, the neatest thing is that the job is always different. It does require a high level of patience, math skills, the ability to do precise calculations, and a willingness to work in a variety of settings on a variety of projects.

▣► The Work

Each carpentry task is somewhat different, but most involve basic steps, such as working from blueprints while laying out, marking, and arranging material. Carpenters cut and shape wood, fiberglass, or drywall

using hand and power tools. Some carpenters are skilled at multiple tasks while others have a specialty. For those remodeling homes, a broad range of carpentry skills is most useful. Carpenters who work on larger commercial projects are more likely to have a specialty, such as tunnel bracing, sewer projects, or finish work.

All carpenters must work in accordance with local building codes, and to be successful you should have manual dexterity, excellent hand-eye coordination, a good sense of balance, and the desire to be in a physically demanding job. The ability to solve arithmetic problems quickly and accurately is also necessary. The bottom line is that you've got to love to build and love what it takes to build.

▣▣▣▣► Work Environment

As is true of other building trades, carpentry can be strenuous. Prolonged standing, climbing, bending, and kneeling are just part of the gig. Carpenters do risk injury working with sharp or rough materials, as well as tools and power equipment, but safety precautions can prevent most injuries. Outdoor carpentry means being in freezing temperatures some months and sweltering heat at other times of the year.

▣▣▣▣► Training and Certification

Carpenters learn their trade through formal and informal training programs. Typically, three to four years of on-the-job training and classroom instruction are needed to become a skilled carpenter. A number of ways to train are available, including job shadowing, but a more formal training program often improves job prospects.

You can really start your carpentry training in high school. Classes in English, algebra, geometry, physics, mechanical drawing, blueprint read-

ing, and general shop prepare students for the trade. After high school, some people get a job as a carpenter's helper, assisting someone who is more experienced. While working as a helper you can simultaneously attend a trade school or community college to receive more formal training. Some employers offer employees formal apprenticeships, which combine on-the-job training with related classroom instruction.

On the job, apprentices learn elementary structural design and become familiar with common carpentry jobs, framing, and finish work. They also learn to use the tools, machines, equipment, and materials of the trade. In the classroom, apprentices learn safety, blueprint reading, freehand sketching, and various carpentry techniques. Both in the classroom and on the job, they learn the relationship between carpentry and the other building trades. Carpenters work closely with other building tradespeople, and while it's not necessary to have their skills, understanding how aspects such as carpentry, electrical work, and plumbing come together to complete a project is helpful.

▣► The Numbers

Carpentry is the largest sector of the building trades, and in 2006 there were 1.5 million carpenters employed around the country. About 32 percent worked in the construction of buildings, and the same percentage was self-employed. Employment is expected to increase by 10 percent by 2016, which means another 150,000 jobs. The increase is expected largely based on the crumbling infrastructure in the United States and the need for new bridges, roads, and tunnels. Some jobs are expected to become available because of retiring workers.

Chapter 7

The Blue-Collar Savings Plan

Who do you think has a better standard of living, a plumber or a doctor? That's the question economics professor Laurence Kotlikoff asks in his book *Spend 'til the End*, and he was admittedly a bit surprised with the answer. Kotlikoff, a professor at Boston University, and his coauthor Scott Burns argue that depending on the circumstances, it just may be the plumber who ends up with the better standard of living.

Why? A lot of it starts with the cost of college and the loans you need to pay for such an education. "For a lot of people it doesn't pay to go to college," Kotlikoff says. "It may not pay if you don't make the median earnings." Kotlikoff says college has been oversold, what with the exorbitant loans and the interest rates attached to them. "It's a

questionable investment to be borrowing that much money at a high interest rate.”

Kotlikoff says the college route makes even less sense “if you haven’t been a stellar student.” If you make it through the four years and end up being stuck at an annual income of \$50,000 a year for the rest of your life, Kotlikoff argues that your loan repayment will weigh you down. The plumber, free of college debt, has an opportunity to save or even spend on vacations, meals out, or new home appliances.

Plus, when it comes to the skilled trades and blue-collar jobs, Kotlikoff points out that “some of these jobs can extend beyond retirement.” That’s not typical with white-collar workers, though. Usually when you retire from an executive job or a sales position, or from being a company manager, that’s it. “There aren’t many people who work as a banker until they’re seventy. If you want to, you may be able to be a plumber until you’re seventy,” says Kotlikoff.

In his book, Kotlikoff compares these two hypothetical people—the plumber and doctor—and after college loans, medical school loans, interest, malpractice insurance, and a higher tax rate, the example illustrates a point worth considering. “[College] has been oversold,” says Kotlikoff. “Everyone is focused on education as the panacea without strong support for that.” Kotlikoff says that when it comes to standard of living, the bottom line is that “whether you went to college matters, but it matters less than you think.”

All that said, it’s still important to invest in your future. Training is key to getting into the blue-collar workforce today, and it’s crucial for moving up the ladder. You may need to spend some money before you can start making money. In other words, even though you may not be planning to finance a college degree you will likely need to pay to get trained. Few things are totally free, including the training and certifi-

cations needed for many blue-collar careers. You may be able to pay cash, you may have parents who are willing to help you out, you might have a savings plan, and, yes, you may have to take out a loan.

We're not planning to give you actual personal financial advice or tell you where to invest your money or how to get a loan. But we can try to help you think about the financial aspects involved in going blue collar. There may be a training program you have your eye on, an associate's degree that will get you where you want to go, or even enrollment costs for that cost-free apprenticeship. If you're going to go out on your own, you'll need to be able to fund your start-up.

While the unions usually cover the actual costs associated with their apprenticeships, it's possible that you'll need certain books or work clothes. You may have to buy basic supplies such as notebooks, if there is classroom training. Small expenses add up—as does the gas to get to and from your training—so it's a good idea to find out in advance just how much money you're going to need for all of the related expenses.

Loans are available for students interested in going into trade school. I know I've been pretty critical of college loans, especially the kinds that send thousands of students and their parents into long-term debt. But what we're talking about here are programs that have much more manageable fees and tuition attached. These programs will not cost you \$30,000 a year for four years the way some private colleges will, but rather you may have to pay \$5,000 for a license or a certification. Think about what you want to do, how badly you want it, how serious you are, and remember that you have to invest in your own future. That \$5,000 to learn to drive a truck, for example, may seem like a ton of cash, but in the end it may be your ticket to a good career as a truck driver. More important, you'll have earned that money back in no time at all. I call that a smart investment.

Brian Greenberg works with families who are saving for college, many of whom are looking to sock away (or borrow) more than \$100,000 to pay for their son or daughter to attend a private college or university. When it comes to saving for a trade school, Greenberg, an accountant with Brian C. Greenberg & Associates in Marlton, New Jersey, says basic principles of saving apply, only on a far smaller scale. Allocating a bit from each paycheck until you reach your goal is the first step toward saving. “There is nothing special or exotic about saving for a blue-collar career,” he says.

But he points out that paying for a trade school is a whole lot less money than a four-year college tuition bill. And when it comes to the payoff, he says borrowing or spending savings of \$5,000 to \$8,000 could be an excellent investment. Greenberg says a young adult who is borrowing or saving for an \$8,000 auto mechanic degree could be earning \$40,000 their first year on the job. “That’s a great investment. It’s a nice deal.”

Greenberg knows that for some families the \$5,000 can be taxing, but he still suggests loans as one way of financing something that could get you into a great paying job. “More people should look at that rather than just going off to college.” Although the money is significant for some, he says you can typically earn it all back in a relatively short amount of time. “The nut is a lot smaller than if you were saving \$100,000 for college. You can go through a lot less hoops.”

Talking Money with Mom and Dad

If you’re heading off to a training program or apprenticeship, you may not have enough to go out on your own. Will you be living at home until you’ve saved? Lay down the ground rules with your parents

or your family. It's important to make some decisions so that there are no misunderstandings. Maybe you'll live at home for the first year until you can pay rent on your own place. Perhaps your parents are even willing to front you some of the money they would have been spending on college. Also, if you're living at home, set a time line. How long do expect to live there? Until you've completed an apprenticeship? One year from the start of your first job? Two years from the end of high school? No matter what the length of time, it's a good idea to have an agreement upfront.

Maybe you're entirely on your own. Make a budget. Map out how much you need for the basics, like food, rent, and utilities. Are you working for a boss, or are you running your own one-person business? You need to think about advertising costs, gas, and other small fees. Don't get caught spending too much on your weekend fun, and don't forget to save. Just because you won't have college loans doesn't mean you couldn't end up in debt quite quickly.

When it comes to figuring out what you may need to save for and what you may need to spend to get yourself on the right track, we've outlined a few areas below. Each one of you will have a different set of circumstances and obstacles. You'll likely be coming from different family and financial situations. No one situation will be the same, but this list should help you start thinking.

Fees. Find out whether you will encounter fees to register, apply for, or enroll in any of the programs you're considering. Ask unions that cover apprenticeship costs if you are responsible for any of the extras, such as books or materials fees. Know the tuition fees associated with training programs. When it comes to certification costs, be sure you know how much you are expected to pay up front and whether you will need to apply for a license (which could mean an additional cost).

Room and board. Will you be living away from home? If you are living at home, will your parents expect you to contribute some money on a monthly basis for food? You may have to start paying car insurance, health insurance, or phone bills. These things add up.

It's important to have a conversation with your parents about what kinds of expenses you'll have once you've graduated from high school. Often parents want to see you demonstrate that you are responsible and that you are taking your decisions seriously. Maybe they will offer to contribute a portion toward healthcare, or auto insurance, or food costs. Maybe they'll cover everything, in which case you should have a plan for saving your money. Talk to them, so there is no misunderstanding, and think about asking them to split some of the costs with you. Maybe they are even willing to loan you some of the money that it takes to get the license you need to be on your way to earning a living.

Loans. Federal Financial Aid (or FAFSA) is the best place to start. More information and applications can be found at www.fafsa.edu.gov. This is one of the most common ways of applying for financial aid. Check out the Department of Education website as well for other links and resources at www.edu.gov. Your guidance counselor should be able to suggest loan options and may even have ideas about local scholarships or grants that are available. Use your guidance counselor and even your school or town librarians as resources. There are some private loan programs that have been set up specifically for trade schools and for community colleges. The websites mentioned above can direct you as can www.collegescholarships.org.

As for financial aid and applying for money, you should know that there are two main ways of paying for tuition costs. The first is grants and scholarships, money that you generally won't have to pay back. And

then there are loans, which you must pay back but these could offer you an opportunity to take courses or earn certifications. I know I've talked about how much money people owe on college loans, but becoming certified or trained for many blue-collar jobs is no longer a luxury; it's a necessity. Perhaps you know of a course that will make you much more attractive to employers. Take it. If you're choosing wisely, the payoff should come soon after you start working. Just do your homework, figure out exactly what you need, rather than just signing up for classes you may never use and loans that will be hard to pay back.

My final piece of advice: if you're looking to save money or borrow money to finance your blue-collar training, spend less. Spend less on clothes, on food, on your car, and on entertainment. I know, I don't need to lecture you about this. I've told my kids this over and over, but you have to make some sacrifices. If you're trying to save to get some training so that you can get the job you want, now is the time to skimp on spending and make a budget. You can reward yourself with a vacation, a night out, a new jacket, or a new tool once you've completed your training and are on your way to earning. But for now, spend less.

Did You Know?

DO THE MATH

Looking for a way to save? At www.finaid.org you can calculate just how much you need to save to get to your goal. This handy online calculator will factor in how much you have in the bank, interest rates, and more.

This is an easy way to set up goals, plus the site offers many resources dedicated to helping you save, invest, and plan for education-related expenses.

Chapter 10

Wait! I Have More Questions

I'm a Student and I Want to Know . . .

Q: I'm worried that my friends will think I'm taking the easy way out if I don't go to college.

A: You will be taking the easy way out if you don't have a plan or focus and if you aren't willing to work hard. Your college-bound buddies will also be taking the easy way out if they don't buckle down, study hard, and plan their career paths. Going to college doesn't mean that you will be working hard, and taking a blue-collar job does not mean that you will have it easy. We each have to decide for ourselves, no matter which career path we take, if we are going to try to slide by or if we are going to do the absolute best we can. I suggest working very hard and giving it all you've got. That's not the easy way out. But just remember,

we're all different. We all wear different clothes, play different sports, and listen to different music. And we won't all like the same jobs. But we should all have goals and work hard to meet them.

Q: I'm tired of being asked, "What college are you going to?" People look at me like I'm crazy when I tell them I'm not going. What am I supposed to say to explain it?

A: Hopefully you have a plan for what you are going to do, and if you don't, you need to sit down and figure one out. That's what this book is supposed to help with. Narrow down your interests and figure out a direction. Do you want to go into electrical work? A green sector? Manufacturing? Decide how you're going to get a job or training. Only then will you be able to offer up an explanation when asked about what you're doing after high school. And even if no one was asking, you should have this plan anyway. You can always alter your plan or change your plan entirely, but being focused and having a goal to work toward are key components to success. And just think, your blue-collar job won't be shipped overseas. You can't outsource the repairs on your car or the installation of those solar panels.

Q: I started college a few years ago, but I'm miserable. I've always wanted to go into the trades. I enjoyed woodworking and would like to be a carpenter, but I have two years of school, lots of debt, and I feel trapped.

A: If you know woodworking and carpentry are for you, then follow your dreams. If you're not quite sure, take some time off from school and get an apprenticeship, or find a job with the best carpenter in your area, even on Saturdays. If this turns out to indeed be

where you want to focus your time, you'll have to start paying back your loans. But there is no sense in continuing to accumulate school loans if you don't think you'll use that education. You may need to invest in tools and training. Plus, a starting salary in your new career could mean a tight budget at first. There is no sense in racking up more school loans. If you're following your passions, feel good about what you're doing, and have a sense of accomplishment, that's the real deal.

Q: I really like the idea of pursuing a blue-collar career, but I don't know which one I'd be good at and I've never taken a shop class or a woodworking class. Where do I start?

A: If you still have the time and the opportunity, take as many CTE classes as possible. If you think something interests you—woodworking or auto mechanics, for example—take a course. If you've finished high school or your school doesn't offer this, then get a job working in one or more of the trades that interest you. Perhaps you can spend your summer working two different jobs, or try one out on Saturdays so you can test the waters. Or bang on doors, make some phone calls, and find out if someone in your area is looking for an apprentice or helper. Explain that you're interested in learning more about their trade and that you want to experience it firsthand. You may not get lucky from your first phone call, but keep trying. And if all else fails, check out your local community college or continuing education center to see if you can take a single course in welding or plumbing.

Q: My parents are insisting that I go to college and won't hear me out when I try to explain how much I don't want to go. I've tried to get them to understand that I have an interest in the trades and want to go that route. Help.

A: It's your life, so dig in your heels. While your parents may mean well in that they want you to be happy and successful, perhaps they think the only way to get there is through college. Have you tried explaining that going to college is so unappealing that you likely won't do well anyway? Have you told them that you may cost them more than it's worth because you don't see yourself finishing? Often kids go to college, and they or their parents accumulate loans and then they still decide to learn a trade, which often means investing more money in that training or certification. If you know what you're interested in, find out some of the numbers and show them to your parents. What are your job prospects, and how much money might you be making? The Bureau of Labor Statistics (www.bls.gov) can help you nail down some of these figures. But explain again that this is about your life and your happiness and that you're not looking for a cop-out and not looking for handouts from Mom and Dad.

Q: My parents have offered to pay for college but they won't help me pay for trade school. Is this fair?

A: Well, it may not be fair, but if that's what is on the table, you have to make a decision. If you do not want to go to a four-year college but you have a plan with regard to trade school, then look into grants, scholarships, and student loans to help cover your costs. Unions often pay for training; other times, employers take care of these costs, so be sure to investigate all options before signing up at a private trade school. That said, you could also try explaining to your parents that this is something that is just as important to you as college is to other people. Explain that you don't want to waste their money. And explain what you want to do with the trade school training. You might even be

able to strike a deal; tell your parents that you will reimburse them for the expense of the trade school if you don't put it to use within six months of receiving the certificate. This is almost a trial-and-error system. If it works, then they've made a great investment. You can also go to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (www.bls.gov) where you can find a ton of information on salaries and job growth for every industry. Show your parents the numbers, show them what you can make your first year or your fifth year, and talk to them about the actual dollars. This may help a lot when they see that you'll be making a real living and aren't just planning to take the easy way out. Remember, too, there are many people in college who are paying their own way. If you want something bad enough, you'll figure out a way to get it.

Q: I've always had the impression that going into one of the trades means being in a dangerous job. Is this true?

A: That's a completely legitimate fear since it's true that there are many more potential hazards in a physical job than in a desk job. You're more likely to get hurt operating heavy equipment, building bridges, or driving a truck cross-country than you are standing at the photocopy machine. That said, common sense and awareness are key. The law is also on your side. Employers are required to comply with strict, federally regulated safety codes of conduct. You do need to be properly trained in certain fields and jobs, but that's why there are licensing boards to help ensure safety and standards. These jobs are generally very safe, but of course building skyscrapers has risks and welding with extreme heat means you could get burned. But that won't happen if you're safe, if you follow rules, and if you know what you're doing. You could also get into a car accident on the way to work, but that would never stop you from showing up each day, right?

Chapter 11

Your Guide to Schools, Apprenticeships, and Postsecondary Trainings Across the Country

As promised, this chapter offers an extensive listing of apprenticeships and trainings as well as unions, associations, and organizations that can assist with launching your blue-collar career. We don't cover every industry, nor is every single postsecondary training opportunity listed for each career. We started with the industries that we talked about in Chapter 3, and we've tried to include information on apprenticeships or certification opportunities in each state, though we don't always hit every single one. We've also tried to stick with those programs that are either recommended or accredited by the industry. That doesn't mean there aren't other great programs out there, perhaps through your local community college or even university. We've tried to do a lot of the work for you, but you'll still have to put

in some time and effort. Your local library and the Internet are great resources as well.

We relied on Career Voyages (www.careervoyages.gov), a partnership between the U.S. Departments of Education and Labor, which is an extensive career guide. The National Center for Construction Education and Research (www.nccer.org), which boasts an incredible database of trade unions and contractor associations in many industries, was another resource for this chapter. Another helpful resource is www.nationalcontractors.com, which provides an overview of state-by-state licensing requirements for many blue-collar fields. There are many private, in-house programs that you may find through contractors, companies, and schools. We haven't included those since it would be nearly impossible to locate and list them all. We also looked to trade organizations that maintain guides for training programs around the country.

While this list was current and accurate at the time of publication, information changes rapidly and programs are routinely altered, added, or eliminated. Check with your nearest apprenticeship, union, or association for the most up-to-date information.

Automotive Service and Repair Technicians

While there are many different routes to take to become an employed auto mechanic or service technician, the National Automotive Technicians Education Foundation (NATEF) and National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) offer outstanding and popular certification programs. Many community colleges can prepare you for a career in automotive service or body work, and many manufacturers and dealerships offer their own specialized programs.

Manufacturer-Specific Programs

Most car manufacturers have programs that give future or prospective employees manufacturer-specific training:

BMW—Service Technician Education Program (STEP)

www.bmwstep.com

GM—Automotive Service Educational Program (ASEP)

www.gmasepbsep.com

Honda—Professional Automotive Career Training (PACT)

www.hondacareers.com

Porsche—Porsche Technology Apprenticeship Program (PTAP)

www.uti.edu/Automotive/ManufacturerPrograms/Porsche/tabid/86/Default.aspx

Toyota—T-Ten

www.toyota.com/about/tten

Chrysler—College Automotive Program (CAP)

www.chryslercap.com

Ford—Automotive Student Service Educational Training (ASSET)

www.fordasset.com

Other Resources

Automotive Careers Today (www.autocareerstoday.net/training) has a searchable, nationwide database of community colleges, technical and vocational schools, and manufacturers that offer automotive training programs.

NATEF and ASE Certified Training Centers

Updated information can be found at www.natef.org.

(If a training center offers manufacturer-specific training it is noted below.)

Alabama

Allen Thornton Career and Technical Center

7275 Hwy. 72
Killen, AL 35645
(256) 757-2101
www.lcschools.org
Programs: Collision Repair and Refinish

Autauga County Technology Center

1301 Upper Kingston Rd.
Prattville, AL 36067
(334) 361-0258
www.autaugacountyschool.org
Programs: Automobile, Collision Repair and Refinish

Bell-Brown Area Vocational Center

PO Box 1380
Livingston, AL 35470
(205) 652-9469
Programs: Automobile

Bevill State Community College

101 S. State St.
Sumiton, AL 35148
(205) 648-3271
Programs: Collision Repair and Refinish

Bibb County Career Tech Center

17191 Hwy. 5
West Blocton, AL 35184
(205) 938-7434
Programs: Automobile, Collision Repair and Refinish

Bishop State Community College

Carver Campus
414 Stanton St.
Mobile, AL 36617
(251) 662-5386
Programs: Collision Repair and Refinish

Blount County Center of Technology

61500 U.S. Hwy. 231
Cleveland, AL 35049
(205) 625-3424
Programs: Automobile, Collision Repair and Refinish

Calhoun County Career Technical Center

1200 Church Ave. SE
Jacksonville, AL 36265

(256) 741-4619

Programs: Automobile, Collision Repair and Refinish

Chambers County Career Technical Center

502 AVC Dr. SE
LaFayette, AL 36862
(334) 864-8863
Programs: Automobile

Cherokee County Career and Tech Center

600 Bay Springs Rd.
Centre, AL 35960
(256) 927-8579
Programs: Automobile

Cleburne County Career Technical School

11200 Hwy. 46
Heflin, AL 36264
(256) 748-2961
www.cleburnecareertech.net/
Programs: Automobile

Cleburne County Career Technical School

11200 Hwy. 46
Heflin, AL 36264
(256) 748-2961
www.cleburnecareertech.net/
Programs: Collision Repair and Refinish

Coosa County Science and Technology Center

Route 2, Box 52
Rockford, AL 35136
(256) 377-4678
Programs: Automobile

Cullman Area Career Center

17640 Hwy. 31 N.
Cullman, AL 35058
(256) 734-7740
www.ccboe.org
Programs: Collision Repair and Refinish, Automobile

Dallas County AVC

1306 Roosevelt Ave.
Selma, AL 36701
(334) 872-2814
Programs: Automobile

Dekalb County Technology Center

429 Main St. E.
Rainsville, AL 35986

(256) 638-3070

Programs: Automobile, Collision Repair and Refinish

Dothan Technology Center

3165 Reeves St.
Dothan, AL 36303
(334) 794-1436
Programs: Automobile

Earnest Pruett Center of Technology

29490 U.S. Hwy. 72
Hollywood, AL 35752
(256) 574-6079
Programs: Collision Repair and Refinish

Eden Career Center

45 County Road 33
Ashville, AL 35953
(205) 594-4122
Programs: Collision Repair and Refinish

Etowah County Career Technical Center

105 Burke Ave. SE
Attalla, AL 35954
(256) 538-8948
www.ecboe.org/careertech
Programs: Automobile, Collision Repair and Refinish

Franklin County Career/Technical Center

85 Jail Springs Rd.
Russellville, AL 35653
(256) 332-2127
franklincoctc.com
Programs: Collision Repair and Refinish

G.C. Wallace Community College

Toyota T-TEN
1141 Wallace Dr.
Dothan, AL 36303
(334) 556-2253
www.wallace.edu/
Programs: Automobile

Houston County Career and Technology Center

801 8th Ave.
PO Drawer 3005
Ashford, AL 36312
(334) 899-3308
Programs: Automobile

J.F. Drake State Technical College
3421 Meridian St. North

Huntsville, AL 35811
(256) 551-3143
Programs: Automobile

**L.B.W. Community College-
MacArthur Campus**
1708 North Main St.
Opp, AL 36467
(334) 493-3573
www.lbwcc.edu/cms/page.aspx
Programs: Automobile

**Lawrence County Center of
Technology**
179 College St.
Moulton, AL 35650
(256) 905-2425
Programs: Automobile

Lawson State Community College
Ford ASSET
GM ASEP
Toyota T-TEN
1100 9th Ave. SW
Bessemer, AL 35022
(205) 929-3483
www.ls.cc.al.us
Programs: Medium/Heavy Truck

**Limestone County Career
Technical Center**
505 East Sanderfer Rd.
Athens, AL 35611
(256) 233-6463
Programs: Automobile, Collision Repair
and Refinish

Madison County Career Academy
1275 Jordan Rd.
Huntsville, AL 35811
(256) 852-2170
Programs: Collision Repair and Refinish

Marengo County Technical Center
2450 East Coast Ave.
Linden, AL 36748
(334) 295-4237
Programs: Automobile

**Muscle Shoals Center for
Technology**
3200 South Wilson Dam Hwy.
Muscle Shoals, AL 35661
(256) 389-2660
Programs: Collision Repair and Refinish

**North Baldwin Center for
Technology**

505 West Hurricane Rd.
Bay Minette, AL 36507
(251) 937-6751
www.nbctschool.com
Programs: Automobile

**Shades Valley Technical
Academy**
5191 Pine Whispers Dr.
Birmingham, AL 35210
(205) 379-2176
Programs: Collision Repair and Refinish

**Shelby County School of
Technology**
701 Hwy. 70
Columbiana, AL 35051
(205) 682-6650
Programs: Automobile, Collision Repair
and Refinish

Alaska

**Alaska Vocational Technical
Center**
809 Second Ave.
PO Box 889
Seward, AK 99664
(907) 224-6155
www.avtec.edu
Programs: Automobile

University of Alaska
Ford ASSET, GM ASEP
3211 Providence Dr., ADT 207
Anchorage, AK 99508
(907) 786-1485
Programs: Medium/Heavy Truck,
Automobile

University of Alaska Southeast
11120 Glacier Hwy.
Juneau, AK 99801
(907) 796-6126
www.uas.alaska.edu/automotive
Programs: Automobile

Arizona

Arizona Western College
2020 S. Ave. 8E
PO Box 929
Yuma, AZ 85366
(928) 344-7569
www.azwestern.edu
Programs: Automobile

GateWay Community College
108 North 40th St.
Phoenix, AZ 85034
(602) 286-8629
www.gatewaycc.edu
Programs: Automobile

Glendale Community College
Ford ASSET, Chrysler CAP
GM ASEP
6000 West Olive Ave.
Glendale, AZ 85302
(623) 845-3950
Programs: Automobile

Northland Pioneer College
102 First Ave.
Holbrook, AZ 86025
(928) 532-6839
Programs: Automobile

Pima Community College
1255 North Stone Ave.
Receiving Dept. COS 110
Tucson, AZ 85709
(520) 206-7194
www.pima.edu
Programs: Automobile

Universal Technical Institute
10695 W. Pierce St.
Avondale, AZ 85323
(623) 445-9452
Programs: Automobile

Arkansas

Area Vo-Tech Center
2203 S. Knoxville Ave.
Russellville, AR 72802
Programs: Automobile

**Arkansas State University Tech
Center**
33500 Hwy. 63 East
Marked Tree, AR 72365
(870) 358-2117
www.asutc.org
Programs: Automobile

Arkansas State University-Searcy
1800 East Moore Ave.
Searcy, AR 72143
(501) 207-4024
www.asub.edu
Programs: Automobile, Collision Repair
and Refinish

Masonry

While it's still considered acceptable for masons to learn on the job, there are programs that specialize in masonry courses and techniques. Many such programs are offered through the International Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers, the Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC), or the Associated General Contractors of America (AGC). Additional information on these training programs is available through the National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER) at www.nccer.org/findCenter.asp. The Masonry Contractors Association of America (MCAA) has also compiled a list of recommended continuing education programs.

Resources

International Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers
www.bacweb.org

MCCA Recommended Training Programs

Alabama

Carver State Tech
 414 Stanton St.
 Mobile, AL 36617
 (251) 473-8692

CEFA
 250 Commerce Pkwy.
 Pelham, AL 35124
 (205) 682-9963

Chambers County Career
 Tech Center
 PO Box 318
 Lafayette, AL 36862
 (334) 864-8864

Hale County Technology Center
 19875 Hwy. 69
 Greensboro, AL 36744
 (334) 624-3691

Reid State Technical College
 PO Box 588
 Evergreen, AL 36401
 (251) 578-1313

Wallace Community College—
 Selma
 3000 Earl Goodwin Pkwy.
 Selma, AL 36702
 (334) 876-9357

Wallace Community College—
 Sparks Campus
 PO Drawer 580
 Eufaula, AL 36027
 (334) 687-3543

Alaska

N/A

Arizona

Arizona Masonry Contractors
 Association
 1803 North 40th St., Ste. 102
 Phoenix, AZ 85008
 (602) 262-0510

Arkansas

N/A

California

Masonry Industry
 Training Association
 PO Box 9966
 Moreno Valley, CA 92552
 (800) 995-4540

Colorado

CITC (Construction Industry Training Council)
646 Mariposa St.
Denver, CO 80204
(303) 893-1500

Rocky Mountain Masonry Institute
686 Mariposa St.
Denver, CO 80204
(303) 893-3838

Connecticut

Mason Contractors Association of CT
One Regency Dr.
Bloomfield, CT 06002
(860) 243-3977

Delaware

N/A

District of Columbia

N/A

Florida

Florida Masonry Apprentice & Educational Foundation Inc.
PO Box 457
Boca Raton, FL 33429-0457
(561) 239-2462

Florida Masonry Apprentice & Educational Foundation Inc.—North
PO Box 1345
Green Cove Springs, FL 32043
(904) 284-7556

Florida Masonry Apprentice & Educational Foundation Inc.—South
861 Nectar Rd.
Venice, FL 34293
(941) 496-4929

South Florida Trowel Trades
3127 West Hallandale Beach Blvd.
Pembroke Park, FL 33009
(954) 985-3807

Georgia

Masonry Association of Georgia
2501 Lantrac Ct.
Decatur, GA 30035
(678) 518-1104

Hawaii

N/A

Idaho

SW Idaho Masonry Apprenticeship Committee
1300 East Franklin Rd.
Meridian, ID 83642
(208) 344-5438

Illinois

BAC Local #8 of Illinois
PO Box 6569
Champaign, IL 61825
(217) 356-0419

Bricklayers' Local 21 of Illinois
1950 West 43rd St.
Chicago, IL 60609
(773) 650-9002

Bricklaying and Masonry Trades JAC
1011 South Grand Ave.
Springfield, IL 62703
(217) 528-0993

Central Illinois Mason Contractors Association
5200 North Knoxville 303N
Peoria, IL 61614
(309) 692-2997

District Council Training Center
2140 Corporate Dr.
Addison, IL 60101
(630) 953-0835

Indiana

IUBAC of Indiana and Kentucky
2008 LaPorte Ave.
Valparaiso, IN 46383
(219) 464-2450

Prosser School of Technology
4202 Charlestown Rd.
New Albany, IN 47150
(812) 949-4266

Iowa

Bricklayers Local #3
2425 Delaware Ave.
Des Moines, IA 50317
(800) 792-7445

Ellsworth Community College
1100 College Ave.
Iowa Falls, IA 50126
(800) 322-9235 ext. 253

Western Iowa Tech Community College
4647 Stone Ave.
Sioux City, IA 51106
(712) 274-8733 ext. 3239

Kansas

Northeast Kansas Technical College
1501 West Riley
Atchison, KS 66002
(913) 367-5220

Kentucky

Construction Training Institute
4517 Poplar Level Rd.
Louisville, KY 40213
(502) 962-2945

Louisiana

BAC Local #6 JATC
3801 Canal, Ste. 211
New Orleans, LA 70119
(504) 483-9929

Maine

Southern Maine
Community College
6 Fort Rd.
South Portland, ME 04106
(207) 741-5800

Maryland

N/A

Massachusetts

IMI New England Regional
Training Center
84 Myron St.
West Springfield, MA 01089
(413) 737-5999

Mason Contractors Association
of MA
PO Box 47
Bridgewater, MA 02324
(508) 697-1120

Michigan

N/A

Minnesota

Alexandria Technical College
1601 Jefferson St.
Alexandria, MN 56308
(320) 762-4458

MN Concrete and Masonry
Contractors Association
26 Exchange St., Ste. 414
St. Paul, MN 55101
(651) 293-0892

Mississippi

N/A

Missouri

BAC Local #15—Springfield
Chapter
414 South Grant
Springfield, MO 65806
(573) 216-7159

BAC Local Union #15
Apprenticeship and
Training Fund
105 West 12th Ave.
North Kansas City, MO 64116
(816) 471-0880

Bricklayer Training Center
4350 Green Ash Dr.
Earth City, MO 63045
(314) 770-1066

Diaz Construction Company
705 Virginia Ave.
Kansas City, MO 64106
(816) 474-3800

Mason Contractors Association
of St. Louis
1429 South Big Bend
St. Louis, MO 63117
(314) 645-1966

Rolla Technical College
1304 East 10th St.
Rolla, MO 65401
(573) 458-0150

South Central Career Center
610 East Olden St.
West Plains, MO 65775
(417) 256-6152

Montana

N/A

Nebraska

Mason Training Institute
17610 Storage Rd.
Omaha, NE 68136
(402) 339-7007

Nebraska Concrete Masonry
Association
PO Box 7196
Omaha, NE 68107
(402) 330-5260

Nevada

N/A

New Hampshire

Associated Builders and
Contractors NH/VT Chapter
6 Dixon Ave.
Concord, NH 03301
(603) 226-4789

New Jersey

International Masonry Institute
3281 Rt. 206
Bordentown, NJ 08505
(609) 324-0500

Ocean County Vo-Tech School
850 Toms River Rd.
Jackson, NJ 08527
(732) 928-3830

New Mexico

N/A

New York

SUNY—Alfred State College
2530 South Brooklyn Ave.
Wellsville, NY 14895
(607) 587-4133

North Carolina

NC Mason Contractors
Association
PO Box 2412
Hickory, NC 28603
(828) 324-1564

North Dakota

Jost Masonry Construction Inc.
PO Box 42
510 Cotton Ave.
Burlington, ND 58722
(701) 838-6059

Ohio

Akron Bricklayers JAC
908 1/2 North Main St.
Akron, OH 43307
(330) 253-5173

Eastland Career Center
302 Edenberry Ln.
Pataskala, OH 43062
(740) 964-9300

Maplewood Career Center
7075 SR 88
Ravenna, OH 44266
(330) 296-2892

**Mason Contractors Association
of Akron and Vicinity**
76 East North St.
Akron, OH 44304
(330) 762-9951

Vanguard Career Center
1306 Cedar St.
Fremont, OH 43420
(419) 332-2626

Oklahoma

**Indian Capital
Technology Center**
Route 4, Box 3320
Stilwell, OK 74960
(918) 696-3111

Kiamichi Technology Center
Route 3, Box 177
Idabel, OK 74745
(580) 286-7555

Northeast Technology Center
PO Box 219
Afton, OK 74331
(918) 257-8324

Northwest AVTS
1490 South Elliott St.
Pryor, OK 74361
(918) 825-5555

Oregon

Masonry Institute of Oregon
3609 SW Corbett, Ste. 4
Portland, OR 97201
(503) 224-1940

**Oregon, SW Washington Mason
Trades Apprenticeship and Training**
12812 NE Marx St.
Portland, OR 97230
(503) 234-3781

Pennsylvania

**BAC, Local 1 of Pennsylvania
and Delaware**
2702 Black Lake Pl.
Philadelphia, PA 19154
(215) 330-0544

Career Technology Center
3201 Rockwell Ave.
Scranton, PA 18508
(570) 346-8471

**Sun Area Career and
Technology Center**
21st Century Dr.
New Berlin, PA 17855
(570) 966-1031

**The Williamson Free School
of Mechanical Trades**
106 South New Middletown Rd.
Media, PA 19063-5299
(610) 566-1776

York County School of Technology
2179 South Queen St.
York, PA 17402
(717) 741-0820

Rhode Island

N/A

South Carolina

Pettit Construction Co. Inc.
PO Box 307
Roebuck, SC 29376
(864) 576-4762

South Dakota

Boxelder Job Corps
PO Box 110
Nemo, SD 57759-0110
(605) 348-3636

Tennessee

**Resource Valley Construction
Training Council**
4700 Western Ave., Ste. 101
Knoxville, TN 37921
(865) 602-2311

Tennessee Technology Center
821 West Louise Ave.
Morristown, TN 37813
(423) 586-5771

Texas

P and S Masonry
PO Box 649
Hamilton, TX 76531
(254) 386-8975 ext. 205

**San Antonio Masonry
Contractors Association**
PO Box 791042
San Antonio, TX 78279
(830) 606-5556

South Texas AGC
518 South Enterprise Pkwy.
Corpus Christi, TX 78405
(361) 289-0996

**South Texas Masonry
Contractors Association**
5205 Agnes St.
Corpus Christi, TX 78406
(361) 289-1072

Texas Masonry Council
314 East Highland Mall Blvd.,
Ste. 510
Austin, TX 78752
(512) 374-9922

Utah

**Ogden/Weber
Technology College**
200 North Washington Blvd.
Ogden, UT 84404
(801) 627-8345

Vermont

N/A

Virginia

Blue Ridge Masonry Association
PO Box 12744
Roanoke, VA 24028
(540) 389-4823

Masonry Institute
PO Box 707
Falls Church, VA 22043
(886) 529-7994

Washington

N/A

West Virginia

Fred Eberle Technical Center
Route 5, Box 2
Buckhannon, WV 26201
(304) 472-1259

Mercer County Technical
Education Center
1397 Stafford Dr.
Princeton, WV 24740
(304) 425-9551

South Branch Career and
Technical Center
401 Peirpont St.
Petersburg, WV 26847
(304) 257-1331

Wisconsin

Milwaukee Area
Technical College
1200 South 71st St.

West Allis, WI 53214
(414) 456-5367

Southwest WI Technical College
1800 Bronson Blvd.
Fennimore, WI 53809
(800) 362-3322

Wisconsin Indianhead
Technical College
1900 College Dr.
Rice Lake, WI 54868
(800) 243-9482 ext. 5281

Wyoming

N/A

Mining

There is no set way into the mining industry, but the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) assists with individuals who are interested in mining with job training and placement. UMWA runs career centers around the country, specifically in areas where there is a mining presence.

United Mine Workers of America (UMWA)

Career Centers

Administrative Office
640 Jefferson Ave.
Washington, PA 15301
(800) 826-2338 or (724)
223-9332

Pennsylvania and Northern West
Virginia Satellite Offices
199 Dunn Station Rd.

Prosperity, PA 15329
(724) 627-6259
Lucernemines, PA 15754
(888) 472-8330 or (724)
479-8692

Fairmont Satellite Office
310 Gaston Ave.
Fairmont, WV 26554
(304) 363-7500

Beckley, WV Office
Mining Technology and Training
Center, Beckley, WV Campus
2306 South Fayette St.
Beckley, WV 25801
(877) 798-8692 or
(304) 253-3772