

Summer jobs for teenagers

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HERE ARE A FEW words of advice to kids still looking for summer jobs. Don't give up.

That may sound lame. But it's not. Even this late in the summer, job hunting could pay off.

As a teenager who worked every summer of my high school years, I enjoyed the material fruits of my labors - money for dates, books, records, clothes, college, and adventure. But I also treasured the intangibles - feeling great new vibes of adulthood and responsibility.

For teens, finding a job this year has been especially challenging. The unemployment rate for 16- to 19-year-olds was just over 19 percent at the beginning of the summer, and teenagers all over were complaining that retailers and other employers seemed to shun them. For July it improved to 16 percent. Somebody must be getting hired.

The best theory of successful job hunting is that a potential employer is always out there - in spite of unemployment trends and labor statistics.

The summer job picture has also gotten slightly better for African-Americans teenagers, whose unemployment rate - while still horrendous - improved from 39 to 36 percent for July.

Experts said teens looking for jobs were experiencing the bite of a sluggish economy, and that sales jobs were hard to come by. But somebody's gotta be ringing up the sales on all those jeans and clam diggers and putting the rejected try-ons back on the shelves, right?

Take Spencer Osaigbovo. This newly minted Teaneck High School grad found a job at Old Navy at the end of July. He says it was just luck, but it was persistence, too. He will keep the job through the school year, building his class schedule at a local college around his work schedule, a familiar juggling act.

Jeff Silver, 18, no stranger to summer work, found it harder than ever this year to land a job. "It took forever," he said, but he finally got hired as a bank teller after applying several places. "You can't just give up after they say 'no,'" said the River Dell High School graduate, who got hired for a job that is challenging and looks good on his résumé.

Young teens found themselves competing more with college kids this year and sometimes with older folks forced to seek alternatives because of a bad economy.

Executive Director of Teens4hire.com Renee Ward says teens should look at the big picture beyond just summer. She has succeeded in developing jobs for teens with Fleet, New York Presbyterian Hospital, and elsewhere.

Danielle Zheng, 17, did everything she could to find a job at the start of the summer, including letting her fingers do the walking in the Yellow Pages. Danielle also pounded the pavement the old-fashioned way, approaching many kinds of potential employers.

While it's generally advisable to not be too picky, it's also important to avoid applying for jobs that would absolutely make you crazy. For example, if you can't stand working around food, don't fill out an application at McDonald's.

Danielle ended up with two jobs, both in formal tutoring programs, which she'll hold on to as she begins her senior year next month at Bergen Academies.

Here's the lesson from her experience: Establish your parameters and priorities, and be pleasant in spite of rejection.

Even if you were told no at the beginning of the summer, you might be surprised to find the same business more receptive now. Jobs open up for odd reasons.

Another person who started the summer with two jobs at one time was Dan Armistead, 18, a June graduate of River Dell headed for college in East Stroudsburg in the fall.

Dan settled into one job as a camp counselor, and gave up a second job at Sportsworld.

One of the strategies for getting jobs is exploiting your connections with adults. In this case his mother was the somebody, who knew somebody, who knew somebody who needed a kid to work for the summer.

Spread the word that you're looking. An important strategy requires that you tell pastors, relatives, parents of your friends - everybody you know - that you need a job for the summer.

And next year, start early and try to have your summer job lined up by the spring. Ideally, you should be all set by March or April. And it's not a bad idea next spring to find a job for a few days a week, let's say at a drug store, toward the end of the school year, and be available to expand your hours during the vacation. Presto! Instant summer job.

The world of work has its downsides, as Danielle Zheng found out. Take payroll deductions. She discovered taxes and Social Security were being taken out of her paycheck.

Another lesson learned. Your way in the world is paved with taxes, my child.