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Qualitative Research Report

Pathways To Well-Paying Careers 2017

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Executive Summary

PATHWAYS TO WELL-PAYING CAREERS 2017 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY of FINDINGS

Project Background – Research conducted by Michigan Future in Detroit in 1998 / 1999 helped identify and understand critical factors impacting career pathways to success. Given many macro-economic and local market changes in the past two decades, the RCWJF, in conjunction with Michigan Future, hired ROI Insight to execute a multi-modal research plan incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to explore current factors impacting earning power and career success within these regions.

Research Objectives - To help understand the paths these adults have followed to achieve career success, a series of eight focus groups was conducted in the last weeks of February and the first week of March, 2017. Individuals without a four-year degree and who are personally making an annual income of at least \$40,000 per year were targeted. One of the primary goals of these open-ended studies was simply to hear the life stories and gain an understanding of the different steps followed by our participants which have led them to where they are today.

Work plan – A series of 8 open-ended, roughly 90-minute focus groups was conducted in professional, one way mirrored focus group facilities in Tonawanda, New York (Buffalo area) and Southfield, Michigan (Detroit area).

Participant Profiles – All participants were adults who had graduated from high school or completed a G.E.D. but had not earned a bachelor's degree or higher. In each of the market areas the four groups consisted of one group each of 8 to 10 participants with the following profile: all men in blue collar jobs, ages 25-60 who earn \$40,000+ annually, men & women ages 25- 40 in 'pink collar' jobs who earn \$40,000+ annually, men & women ages 41- 65 in 'pink collar' jobs who earn \$50,000+ annually, and all women (any occupation), ages 25-65 who earn \$40,000+ annually.

Participant Backgrounds and Career Pathways - Our participants had a wide array of personal experiences leading to their current professional position.

❖ **General Observations** - Our participants' fields of employment were wide ranging with varied career paths. Few had worked for only one employer or in a single field their entire working lives. Many had held a variety of jobs but have several years of experience with their current employer or field. Some had been employed in extremely diverse job fields and at least a few had endured traumatic and dramatic career events. The type, amount and significance of both formal and informal education and training also varied tremendously. A minority of participants had completed a degree, certification program or apprenticeship program in high school or shortly after and continued in the field of their training. Many more had 'found' their career success somewhat accidentally: they became aware of training and advancement opportunities once on the job. These unconventional, nonlinear pathways were particularly notable in the Detroit area focus groups where very few were hired given their education, training or earned credentials and instead were promoted once, as an employee, gained on the job experience or completed professional training. In some instances (as explained later), their employers were instrumental in

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identifying educational and career opportunities. For others, coworkers or more simply, work-place experience generated an awareness of ways to move forward with their current employer or career field. Most advanced step by step – often with twists and turns – without a defined, final career position in mind.

- ❖ **A Military Start** – At least a few in each group had served in the military. These experiences were universally respected for instilling sense of discipline, teamwork and focus.
- ❖ **Simple and Straightforward**– Many had worked for one employer or stayed in a single, narrow career field for their entire career to date. For some, they truly loved their job, employer and career field and considered themselves lucky to have the jobs they did. For others, they don't necessarily love their jobs, but they value the fact they are employed and heading toward retirement, which is a significant disincentive to change employers. For the most part, any changes in employers or career field were self-chosen,
 - Dissatisfaction Driven Change - At least a handful of participants changed jobs or career fields because they were unhappy with their current job. Some disliked their supervisor or job conditions. Others sought higher pay or benefits.
 - Limited Advancement Opportunity - Some switched jobs given perceptions of nonexistent or limited promotional opportunities with their current employer. In a few cases, moving into a supervisory or management position necessitated a bachelor's degree.
- ❖ **Volatile and Unpredictable** - Many had (by choice or circumstance) experienced a significant number of job and career field changes. For some – particularly those over forty – their career paths involved several jobs with various employers.
 - Family / Life Events - Several stayed in jobs they don't really love because of a practical need to earn a living or to secure health insurance and other benefits for themselves and their families. Unexpected life events forced many to pursue different jobs or change career fields. Sometimes these events were stressful (e.g. divorce, death, health issues) and other times unforeseen opportunities and positive events (e.g. marriage or the birth of a child) induced employment changes.
 - Forced Job Loss – A limited number had lost jobs or been forced to relocate due to plant closings, mergers, acquisitions, off-shore job movements, emerging technologies, corporate decisions and other disruptions.

Factors Impacting Career Success - Several common personal attributes were shared by our 'successful' participants.

- ❖ **Personal Qualities** – Individual's learned and natural qualities empowered success.
 - Natural Aptitudes, Knowledge, Skills & Abilities – Many of our participants were naturally intelligent and possessed a wide array of talents which empowered their ability to excel at work. They used their innate intelligence to master requirements of their jobs and in many cases, went above and beyond the minimum required to be a top performer.
 - Good People Skills - Many had strong 'people skills' and good communication abilities. Others were compassionate with a strong customer service orientation. They connected these attributes with career satisfaction and success.
 - Strong Technical Abilities - Many of our participants had strong 'hard skills'. Whether a great spot welder, accurate contractor estimator, adept at shaving,

a fast typist or gifted with a natural grasp of technology, they had attributes valued by their employers and important to their personal career success. They easily grasped and tackled sometimes challenging and ever-changing job responsibilities.

- Creative Problem-Solving / Multi-tasking - Another skill set common to many, was the able to multi-task and look for creative solutions to sometimes perplexing job challenges. These adults have the ability to deal with high-pressure situations, to think outside of the box, and to consider alternative approaches to solving demanding job requirements to improve operational efficiency.
- Intrinsic Values & Personality Traits – Many exhibited impressive values and personality characteristics that directly correlated to career success.
 - Work Ethic A critically important and very common characteristic of our participants was the possession of a strong work ethic. They're likely to show up early, stay late, and take ownership of their job responsibilities. They also understand and respect the importance of teams, of doing what was needed to exceed job requirements. For a few, this commitment leads to resentment from coworkers who do not share the same sense of responsibility. They take pride in their accomplishments and do not need to be recognized for their contributions.
 - Ambition & Self-Initiative - Many participants exhibited signs of confidence and strong character. They impressed us with their positive attitudes to succeed no matter the barriers placed in front of them. If they thought something could be done to help their employer be more productive or efficient, they weren't afraid to speak up and take the reins to implement new and better ways of doing things. Some had to overcome significant hurdles to succeed.
 - Perseverance - Several individuals shared their jobs are often less than exhilarating, are repetitious or otherwise minimally rewarding. That said, they show up for work every day, don't complain and made sure the job is completed to a high standard. They're also pro-active risk-takers; they tackle challenges and try new ways to doing things to improve their personal performances and help improve the productivity of their employers.
 - Adaptability & Preparation - A common characteristic of many was the importance placed on adapting to meet the changing needs of their current position and to become qualified for future advancement opportunities. To improve their skills, they learned from others through both formal and informal training and often took it upon themselves to figure out how to master new challenges on their own. For some, this meant gaining certifications or studying for exams (e.g. Civil Service) which were requirements for promotions. They feel strongly the need to continually and consistently improve their knowledge, skills and abilities. They took advantage of employer offered training, learned from watching coworkers and supervisors and pursued whatever knowledge and skills were necessary for promotion.
 - Curiosity & Job Satisfaction– Notable among some of the youngest participants but common among many, was a high-level of curiosity. They enjoy learning more about their own job, field of work, what can be done to help themselves

and their employers succeed. A very common thread among our many participants was deep satisfaction with their chosen (or accidental) career field.

- Confidence and Humility- With few exceptions, our interviewees were confident they were highly qualified employees. Many were humble and unassuming; they quietly worked hard to meet job requirements.
- ❖ **Education and Training** – Education and training was a key factor of career success for most.
 - Formal –Nearly all participants had completed one or more classes or training programs.
 - Public & Private Schooling Perhaps fifty-percent of our participants had earned an associate’s degree or completed a certification or other degree program. Quite a few had earned some credits at a two or four-year college or university; a few nearly completed an associate’s or bachelor’s program. Many attend employer or government mandated training seminars provided either at the workplace or off site. Although some thought much of their formal education had little impact on their current success (typically if they were not in that line of work), others credited formal training and degrees earned with empowering their on-the-job effectiveness.
 - On the Job - Many employers offer and / or demand on-the-job training. In some cases, the mandated training was considered a waste of time. Typically these instances involved state, federal or industry required re-certifications or simple continuing education. Other mandated training is required to teach employees new techniques, technologies or orient them to different machines or ways of doing business. For some, their talents were noticed and their career mobility was rapid. As they were promoted, they learned how to meet and often exceed the new demands of their positions.
 - Informal –Most of our participants educated themselves well beyond what was mandated by their employers or professions.
 - At Home / Personal Time – Many attended conferences, googled information of professional interest or otherwise committed to improving their job related knowledge and skills.
 - At Work - Quite a bit of training / education occurs informally in the work place. Ambitious, curious employees learn from watching their peers and supervisors competently complete their own work responsibilities. In many instances, supervisors and managers see and appreciate this interest and reach out to share what they know with their subordinates. Good mentors also were credited with giving praise and prompting diligent subordinates to seek out higher level, more challenging positions.

Opinion-leaders and Gatekeepers - Toward the end of the focus group sessions we asked our participants to identify who and how different individuals had impacted their career paths.

- ❖ **Self** - Many of our successful employees have found their way to where they are with minimal assistance from others. They made mistakes, but also identified and pursued opportunities. They are ambitious and often seek out opportunities to move to a more desirable job. When faced with obstacles, they are strategic in finding solutions.

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- ❖ **Family & Friends** - Not surprisingly, family members – most commonly a parent or grandparent – have strong (usually positive) influences on career choices. More than a few mentioned lessons learned from elders. The most typical ‘lesson’ was to work hard, always be prepared to take care of yourself and to some extent, to ‘make things happen’. Some spouses were also very supportive in this way. In a few instances, our participants had taken over their family’s business or had ‘followed in the footsteps’ of a parent or sibling.
- ❖ **Employers & Co-workers** - Several employees had progressed from very low, entry level positions to positions of high authority. Employers and co-workers influenced participants in several ways. Some supervisors saw potential in their subordinate and encouraged that person to understand and pursue their strengths. They also shared their knowledge of career paths and potential positions worth targeting. This helped to boost self-esteem and empower the employee’s belief that he or she could succeed in a higher-level position. Some mentioned coworker animosity. A few younger participants noted it can be difficult to supervise older, often more experienced employees. Younger managers – often with a college degree but little on-the-job experience – can be frustrating as they don’t fully respect the capabilities and institutional knowledge of more experienced workers.

Gender also played a role in job satisfaction. A few women mentioned sexism in the workplace. Some women noted it was other female coworkers who were more likely to prove difficult in the workplace.

- ❖ **Educators** - Just a few identified educators (teachers or guidance counselors) as having had a major impact on career decisions and pathways. Some had experienced great success in classes which helped them to realize their potential, but it was more a self-realization than meaningful instruction or motivation from an educator.

Future Expectations – Most participants were optimistic about their futures.

- ❖ **Worrisome** - There were only a few participants who were pessimistic about their career security, even though some see how technology and other market forces are rapidly impacting their industry. Others shared mergers and acquisitions were realistic possibilities that may force them to relocate or lose their jobs. Even those who were worried tended to believe they had the job skills, experience and connections necessary to land a new position.
- ❖ **Optimistic** - Participants were optimistic about their future job prospects. For some nearing the end of full-time employment, they believe they need to just “hang on” or “put in the time” to qualify for full retirement. Many did not intend to entirely discontinue working. Some of the younger skilled workers were especially optimistic. Many were confident their career field would grow – particularly those in information technology and healthcare. Others in the skilled trades see many coworkers nearing retirement and remain confident their skills and talents will continue to fulfill a need.

Lessons Learned and Advice to Share – Participants had much to share with younger adults to assist them in making wise career choices

- ❖ **Make Better Choices** - Many wished they had taken high school and career choices more seriously at a younger age. Some had ‘partied’ too much, others were heavily into sports,

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dating or not focused on their careers. Others made poor career field choices and spent time and money taking classes which have yielded little or no benefit.

- ❖ **Consider the Trades** - Both pink and blue collar workers believed more younger people should seriously consider pursuing jobs in the trades. They knew that many college educated adults have weak job prospects and that there were great opportunities for high paid jobs with good benefits in the trades. Many blamed schools and society for disparaging working with your hands or accepting jobs that might require schooling but not a bachelor's degree or greater.
- ❖ **Stay in the Military** - At least a few regretted having completed only a four or six year stint. In retrospection, they knew if they had stayed in the military they would be close to retirement with guaranteed earnings and benefits. They suggested the armed forces should be more seriously considered by many young adults.
- ❖ **Find and Pursue Your Passion** - A pervasive recommendation was for young adults to find something they truly loved, to pursue it with all of their energy and to 'make things happen'. They truly believed you needed – and could – create your own opportunities in life. They also shared that too many adults are not realistic in their expectations and are not grateful for what they have; they should appreciate not just their job but all the gifts within their lives.
- ❖ **Be Versatile and Open-minded** - Advice given from many was for younger adults to be broaden their skill set and be prepared for change. They also believed a great source of inspiration and insight was to listen and learn from others, particularly those with more age, experience and wisdom.
- ❖ **Manage Your Finances and Credit** - Some wished they had managed their personal credit and finances better. They admonished adults entering the workforce to minimize debt, to watch their credit ratings, to begin saving for retirement at an early age.
- ❖ **Earn a Bachelor's Degree** - A small group regretted not completing a bachelor's degree and would advise others to do whatever was needed to complete at least four years of college. Some planned to do so in the future. The perceived value of a bachelor's degree stems from the knowledge that many positions simply require the degree to simply apply. There was some belief that a bachelor's degree (or masters) would open up job opportunities and offer higher incomes and more security. However, nearly everyone believed they were fully qualified and could meet the demands of jobs requiring the degree.

Concluding Remarks – Much was learned from our focus groups. This insight can assist in developing messages and programs to improve career success of adults who do not earn a bachelor's degree.

- ❖ **Defining Success** - Some participants earn six-figure incomes and hold positions of high authority, despite never having obtained a four-year college degree. A few of our youngest participants were notably successful, possessing management level or high-skilled jobs and an almost unlimited potential to earn more and move up in their current field or another. However, many of our employees – particularly those over forty – earn a decent income (\$40,000+) but have not moved into higher positions. They've simply stayed with one employer or in a single field for enough years to earn a middle income, and many of these adults have little upward mobility potential or motivation.
- ❖ **Skills Portability, Continual Training & Networking** - To help bolster job security and promotional opportunities with their current employer or prepare for a potential

opportunity with a different employer, many possess a strong desire to continually learn and build their arsenal of skills. In some instances, this involves formal on-the-job or professional training. In other cases, simply observing others and building skills on personal time (reading self-help books, manuals, etc.), helps fulfill an innate desire to know more and be better prepared for whatever the future brings. The importance of networking was also brought up by several participants. They know that in this ever-changing world, they need to be prepared for unforeseen curves. Many formally developed and nursed networks of friends, others in their field of work or frankly anyone who might be valuable to know should a job be needed.

- ❖ **Ambition & Perseverance** – Most participants showed resilience, ambition and perseverance. When faced with challenges, they addressed them. When offered opportunities, they took them. When employers were demanding, they accepted the situation and met or exceeded expectations. When jobs were lost or disliked, they took the steps to find new jobs, to reposition themselves.
- ❖ **Positivity, Passion, Confidence & Self-Reliance** - Most employees truly love what they do. And for those who don't love their jobs, they were at least highly committed to performing for their employer at a high level. Some regretted not pursuing other career paths, but virtually no one expressed regret at working too hard or caring too much about meeting or exceeding job expectations. They take pride in their work and truly feel an obligation to do their job to the very best of their ability. They're also confident of their abilities; they truly believe they're good at what they do and if they have doubts about shortcomings, they address them with training or extra efforts to become competent. Tied to these qualities is a streak of self-reliance, taking responsibility for not only what is required of them but also taking initiative to address any (appropriate) work task that needs attention.

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Comprehensive Report of Findings

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I. PROJECT BACKGROUND

A key strategic goal of the Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Foundation (RCWJF) is to empower the career success of adults in the Southeast Michigan and Western New York regions. Of specific interest is how to help adults who do not have the means, perceived need or intentions to obtain a four-year (or higher) college degree. Research conducted by Michigan Future in Detroit in 1998 / 1999 helped identify and understand critical factors impacting career pathways to success. Given many macro-economic and local market changes in the past two decades, the RCWJF, in conjunction with Michigan Future, hired ROI Insight to execute a multi-modal research plan incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to explore current factors impacting earning power and career success within these regions. This report covers the first phase – the qualitative component - of the research plan.

II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

To help understand the paths these adults have followed to achieve career success, a series of eight focus groups was conducted in the last weeks of February and the first week of March, 2017. Individuals without a four-year degree and who are personally making an annual income of at least \$40,000 per year were targeted. One of the primary goals of these open-ended studies was simply to hear the life stories and gain an understanding of the different steps followed by our participants which have led them to where they are today. **(Attachment A: “Participant Profiles” briefly describes both current and previous employment positions and job fields. Please see Attachment B: “Focus Group Moderator Guide” for the complete discussion outline used to facilitate the discussion sessions).** Following are the major topical areas covered in the focus group series:

- *Description of current employment, employers and previous jobs held,*
- *Listing, description and assessments of career related education and training including certifications, degrees and credentials earned, apprenticeships completed, on the job training and self-directed learning efforts,*

- *Exploration of personal knowledge, skills, abilities and other factors perceived to have impacted career choices and success,*
- *Identification of any pivotal factors impacting the need or desire to change jobs or career fields,*
- *Notation and assessment of people who influenced (positively or negatively) career placement, success, and job satisfaction,*
- *Lessons learned, regrets or advice gleaned from career choices that might be of value to others.*

III. WORKPLAN: FOCUS GROUP DETAILS

A series of 8 open-ended, roughly 90-minute focus groups was conducted in professional, one way mirrored focus group facilities in Tonawanda, New York (Buffalo area) and Southfield, Michigan (Detroit area). The sessions were completed on the evenings of February 22nd, 23rd and March 1st and 2nd 2017. Each of the eight groups had between eight and ten participants. Each participant was paid an honorarium of \$75 for their participation. All sessions were audio and video taped. Full unedited transcripts were generated from the audio recordings. (See **Attachment C: Unedited Transcripts.**) Please note: direct quotations (single spaced, italicized and in bold face) from each of these transcripts will be provided within this Report to support findings and analysis. The number of the group (as noted in the table on the following page) identifies the group in which the participant shared the comment included.

As noted in the work-plan table below, each of the four focus groups conducted in the two markets areas was comprised of adults with a unique set of demographic characteristics. Breaking the series by occupation, age and gender was justified on the premise that these dimensions were believed to potentially yield a wide array of different experiences and perceptions likely valuable to both the design of a survey instrument and for use by decision makers charged with programmatic and other are Foundation responsibilities.

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The following screens were used to recruit and confirm eleven to twelve participants in each of the eight focus groups. (Please note: professionals employed by the two facilities assumed full responsibility for recruiting and confirming all participants and handling technical and venue arrangements.) Some common characteristics of the composition of all groups included:

- All were residents within 20 miles of either the city of Buffalo or Detroit.
- A minimum of four of twelve recruited for each group were non-Caucasian.
- All were employed full-time.
- None possessed a bachelor’s degree or higher. (Note: there were 2 exceptions in Southfield where individuals told recruiters they had not earned a bachelor’s degree during the recruitment process but said they did have a B.A. or B.S. degree during the focus groups.)
- Public relations, advertising, media or marketing research professionals were excluded from all groups.

TABLE 1: FOCUS GROUP RESEARCH PLAN

Group #	Time & Date	Venue Location	Participant Profile (Occupation, Gender, Age and Income)
1	Wednesday, Feb. 22, 5:30 pm	Adelman Research Group (Tonawanda / Buffalo, New York)	“Blue Collar”, all men, ages 25-60, \$40K + annual income
2	Wednesday, Feb. 22, 7:30 pm	Adelman Research Group (Tonawanda / Buffalo, New York)	“Pink Collar”, men & women, ages 25-40, \$40K+ annual income
3	Thursday, Feb. 23 5:30 pm	Adelman Research Group (Tonawanda / Buffalo, New York)	“Pink Collar”, men & women, ages 41-65, \$50K+ annual income
4	Thursday, Feb. 23 7:30 pm	Adelman Research Group (Tonawanda / Buffalo, New York)	Any occupation, all women, ages 25-65, \$40K+ annual income
5	Wednesday, March 1 5:30 pm	Michigan Market Research (Southfield / Detroit, Michigan)	“Blue Collar”, all men, ages 25-60, \$40K + annual income
6	Wednesday, March 1 7:30 pm	Michigan Market Research (Southfield / Detroit, Michigan)	“Pink Collar”, men & women, ages 25-40, \$50K+ annual income
7	Thursday, March 2 5:30 pm	Michigan Market Research (Southfield / Detroit, Michigan)	“Pink Collar”, men & women, ages 41-65, \$40K+ annual income
8	Thursday, March 2 7:30 pm	Michigan Market Research (Southfield / Detroit, Michigan)	Any occupation, all women, ages 25-65, \$40K+ annual income

IV. FINDINGS

The completed series of focus groups generated the following observations and conclusions.

A) PARTICIPANT BACKGROUNDS and CAREER PATHWAYS

The focus groups began with the moderator introducing himself and sharing rules and expectations of the sessions. Each participant then introduced him or herself and responded to the following questions by providing information in fair detail but with minimal commentary:

- 1) What is your current job / occupation? (*What do you do?*)
- 2) Who is your employer? How long have you been with this employer / in this career field?
- 3) What previous jobs have you held? (*If several, briefly summarize...*)
- 4) Note any formal or informal education, training you've completed (including degrees and certifications earned, apprenticeships / on the job training completed, self-learning and other experiences.)

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The following “Profile Tables” summarize the current and past employment experiences, and education and training of our participants.

GROUP 1: BLUE COLLAR MEN / Buffalo, New York / Feb. 22, 5:30 pm				
Participant Name	Current Employer	Current Position	Past Employment	Education / Training
Richard	Union Contracting Electrical Construction Company (participant family owned)	VP/ Chief of Operations	Military (Air Force), State Dept.	Hutchinson Central Tech. School, multiple courses / certifications, some college
Diedrich	Xylem Industries	Brazier/ PPO	iTechnologies / manuf. Technician / production planner	Some college (toward an associates), OJT in production planning / inventory mgmt..
Mike	N.Y. Dept. of Transportation	Maintenance worker	Manager / Ted's Hot Dogs restaurant	Assoc. Degree / restaurant mgmt
Mark	Supervisor (road / sewer maintenance)	City of Tonawanda	None	High school only
Dave	mechanic	Car dealership management	Township parks dept.	Dealership training
Jim	Maintenance mechanic		Tyson Foods mechanic, Muller Dairy, Coast Guard, Spalding Fiber, St. Mary's High School++	Navy Tech. School (hydraulics and welding classes), Assoc. degree in mech. Tech., vocational school...
Jamar	State Corrections	Prison guard	Military (6 years0	OJT
Jason	Central (medical) supply	Buffalo General hospital		Employer paid training at TripleC (community college)
Vinnie	Master electrician	City of Buffalo	Bouncer, security work	Significant OJT, apprenticeships, union training
Ken	CAD/ CAM... drafting	C&C Machining		Self taught, OJT

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GROUP 2: YOUNGER PINK COLLAR MEN & WOMEN / Buffalo, New York / Feb. 22, 7:30 pm				
Participant Name	Current Employer	Current Position	Past Employment	Education / Training
Julie	PNA Group	Benefits administer	Retail, telemarketing, collections+++	High School, some Microsoft classes (employer paid, off site)
Heather	William Mattar Law Offices	Paralegal	Other paralegal, admin. Asst., secretarial...	Associates (paralegal)
Dan	Huber Construction	Estimator (commercial construction)	Delta Sonic (car detailer)	Associates (construction tech.), CAD classes, Dale Carnegie
Mike	Fidelis Care	Authorization coordinator	United HealthCare, collections	Graphic design courses (personal interest)
Jessica	Ingram Micro (tech distributor)	Sales Rep	Lifeguard, waitress	Bachelors degree (poly sci / international relations)
Jason	WellCare Health Plans	Marketing hardware specialist (benefits sales)	Life insurance sales, home security sales, Military (7 years)++	Canisus Community College (no degree earned), other private ed. providers for business & culinary arts
E.J.	Geico	IT applications analyst	Other Geico jobs (sales, IT)... auto insurance sales, retail...	Associates with 'mutiple credits' toward B.A., OJT IT training w/ Geico, self study...
Zach	Impressive Companies (textiles)	Customer service / sales (management)	Several jobs with Impressive (starting on the line)	OJT, conferences and self study (non-employer required or paid)

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GROUP 3: OLDER PINK COLLAR MEN & WOMEN / Buffalo, New York / Feb. 23, 5:30 pm				
Participant Name	Current Employer	Current Position	Past Employment	Education / Training
Mark	Large religious congregation	Business manager	Accounting for adult care, electrical contractor, roofer	Associates (accounting), several IT courses
Chris	State Dept. of Transportation	Road crew supervisor	None (35 years with State)	High school & OJT
Joanne	Law Enforcement (911?)	secretary	none	OJT (much mandated)... inside and with external providers
Caroline	Fidelis	Medicare Sales Rep	Univera Healthcare (medicare sales rep), Westinghouse Electric	Associates & Rochester Business Institute (and required State licensing con-ed)
Stacy	Roswell Park Cancer Institute	Mammographer	x-ray tech	Employer mandated tech update training
Latasha	Veteran's Hospital	Nurse	Home health aide	Associates (LPN), mandatory con-ed
Jason	Autism Services (non-profit)	Direct professional support aide (client care)	Security	"SKIP" (training to deal with autistic clients), CPR
Bill	David Chevrolet	Parts dept. mgr. (26 years)	Other auto dealerships	Some community college courses, some dealership training
Enrique	NationStar Mortgage	Asset manager (loss mitigation specialist)	Seneca (purchased by NationStar), collections... Bank of America	High school grad., OJT (related to legal updates)

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GROUP 4: MIXED OCCUPATION ALL WOMEN / Buffalo, New York / Feb. 23, 7:30 pm				
Participant Name	Current Employer	Current Position	Past Employment	Education / Training
Shante'	Buffalo Psych Center	Mental health therapy aide	Human services, worked at a group home	A few college courses.
Cindy	Buffalo State College	Senior storage clerk	(with State for 19 years..), State Corrections	Partial completion of a bachelor's
Mary	City of Buffalo	Police complaint writer (911 call-taker)	Child & Family Services (State)	Many college credits, intensive OJT, con-ed....,
Lori	M&T Bank	Insurance compliance officer (oversees major investment transactions)	Citibank (path included starting as a teller... moved through SEVERAL positions to upper mgmt..)	2 years of college (toward a B.A.
Jessica	court reporter	(free lance / self-employed)	Bank Teller,	1 year at Mercyhurst (toward B.A.), court reporting school, continual self-practice
Shaneka	Erie Community College	Senior clerk typist	Time Warner Cable (customer services / sales rep), bank teller	Assoc. in bus. Admin & entrepreneurship, in school for paralegal
Tania	United Health Care	Senior Marketing Rep	Buffalo Public Schools	Insurance licenses, required con-ed
Diane	Akron School System	cook	None (started as a substitute teacher then kitchen aide in the school)	Job required food safety training

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GROUP 5: BLUE COLLAR MEN / Southfield, Michigan / March 1, 5:30 pm				
	Current Employer	Current Position	Past Employment	Education / Training
Kevin	Fiat Chrysler	Assembly worker	Ministry (15 years, director), radio station production	Eastern Michigan B.S., (in public relations), ministry classes... , OJT with Chrysler
Steve	U.S. Army	Electronics technician (specializes in crash dummies)	Automotive... safety standards, crash research	"National Education Center", electronics certification
Theo	Johnson Controls	IT	Army (8 years)	Northwestern Tech. (HVAC certification)
Cortez	Detroit Steel Processing	Slitter operator (steel cutter)	Home Depot (security guard)	Community college credits for law enforcement, OJT steel cutting
David	County Prison	Runs a halfway house	Home repair (wood worker – part time from past to present)	Macomb Community College (some)
Daryl	Specialized Security	Security Guard	Cook, Hi-low driving, Hazmat material loading	Certification in mediation
Tom	Ecolab	Commercial dishwashing machine inspector	Owned a pizzeria	Year and a half of college
Steve	Owns family pest control (mammals) and small graphic sign company	Remove animals, create and place signs / banners	Built movie theaters	Vocation Ed (for auto body) certification, massage therapist training
Mike	Entrepreneur (owns construction business)	Builder / construction	Landscaping, various construction jobs, mechanic, Coast Guard	Bachelors degree, master builders license, HVAC classes
Kwan	Lear Seating	Assembly	Manufacturing quality inspector	HVAC training

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GROUP 6: YOUNGER PINK COLLAR MEN & WOMEN / Southfield, Michigan / March 1, 7:30 pm				
Participant Name	Current Employer	Current Position	Past Employment	Education / Training
Alea	State of Michigan	Breast Feeding Educator	Manufacturing quality control	OJT (federally funded breastfeeding ed.), State required con-ed
Markesha	Sinai-Grace Hospital DMC	Patient enrolling associate	ENT assistant	Currently in nursing school (B.S.)
Shelby	Self	Owens daycare operation	Taught preschool	Associates degree (gen studies & business)
Scott	Pepsi	Route Sales	Home remodeling	1 year of college (toward B.A.)
Crystal	Adams Distribution	Secretary	Nursing home asst.	CAN certification
Lucenteer	Providence Park Hospital	Xray tech	Volunteer (xray tech)	Assoc. degree (xray tech)
Linea	Wyandotte Hospital E.R.	CNA (autism specialty)	Autism services (CLS?)	Associates (early childhood ed.)
Tony	Providence Hospital	Surgical service tech (pre-op specialist)	Group home asst.	OJT
Rob	Emagine Theater Entrepreneur	Projectionist Owns / operates photo booth	Part time work in film industry	Film school (certification)

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GROUP 7: OLDER PINK COLLAR MEN & WOMEN / Southfield, Michigan / March 2, 5:30 pm				
Participant Name	Current Employer	Current Position	Past Employment	Education / Training
Buffy	Ally Financial	IT project manager	EDS, Dept. of Defense (project mgmt..)	OJT, classes toward Associates
Henry	Elite Line Services	Maintenance supervisor	none	OJT
Patty	Chartwells Food Service Co. (public school client)	Cook	Sodexo (for Grosse Pointe Schools), H&R Block, stay at home mom	Sawyer School of Business (certificate in word processing)
Cindy	Henry Ford Health System	Cardiac sonographer	none	Carnegie Institute (certificate in x ray tech)
Valerie	Private (large) Catering Co.	Caterer (planner, supervisor)	Other caterers	OJT and some food safety classes
Tracy	Orchard, Hiltz & McCliment (large civil engineering firm)	Corporate secretary	Other admin asst. positions	Detroit Legal Academy (certificate in court reporting), Associates Degree, misc. courses
Reggie	Costco	distribution center manager	Low level Costco jobs, Ford Motor line supervisor	OJT
Ed	Large engineering firm	Web designer	Graphic designer, offset printing	Macomb C.C. and Oakland Univ. (Just short of a bachelors)
Kareem	Postal Service	Mail carrier	Marines, forklift operator, material coordinator / supervisor	Military training, postal service OJT, other OJT

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GROUP 8: MIXED OCCUPATION ALL WOMEN / Southfield, Michigan / March 2, 7:30 pm				
Participant Name	Current Employer	Current Position	Past Employment	Education / Training
Vanessa	Mode One Transportation & Logistics	Business development	Middleman Trucking Co. (logistics)	1 semester of college (Wayne State), currently at Wayne C.C. (general studies)
Regine	United Home Health Services	Home health aide	Customer service / retail	Associates from Oakland C.C., attended Ferris State 2 years
Stacy	Douglas Electric Company	Service coordinator	Service coordinator (for a different firm)	Associates degree (travel & tourism)
Carla	Coumadin Clinic	Bloodwork specialist	phlebotomist	Associates degree (Oakland C.C. / phlebotomist), certifications (industry mandated)
Francine	Farmington Hills Police Dept.	Records administrator (FOIA...)	Toll processor	High school
Debbie	Harbor Oaks Hospital (mental health)	Receptionist / registration clerk	Admin. Asst. (for engineering co.)	Some community college credits
Sharon	Lupus Detroit (non-profit)	CEO / Founder	Flight attendant	Nearly a B.A. in journalism (Florida A & M)
Shimira	Phoenix Success	Founder / CEO	Behavior mgmt.. specialist, youth supervisor (non profit)	Some college (Eastern Kentucky), many workshops
Tuere	Tier 2 Auto Supplier	Spot welder	Work from home (phone sales), restaurant manager	High school
Deborah	City of Detroit	Bus driver	Truman Transportation (bus driver)	Some classes at Davenport and other colleges

Roughly 80 participants held a wide range of jobs in several different career fields. For example, in the two blue-collar all-men groups (#1 and 5), careers include mechanics, machinists, truck drivers, electrical contractors, auto manufacturer line workers, landscapers and construction professionals. In the six remaining groups (which included four pink collar and two all women) both skilled and non-skilled workers from several market sectors participated, including healthcare fields, city and state government, public schools and insurance, and banking, investment and insurance.

- **General Observations**

As summarized in the Participant Profile Tables above, our participants' fields of employment were wide ranging with varied career paths. Few had worked for only one employer or in a single field their entire working lives. Many had held a variety of jobs but have several years of experience with their current employer or field. Some had been employed in extremely diverse job fields and at least a few had endured traumatic and dramatic career events.

The type, amount and significance of both formal and informal education and training also varied tremendously. A minority of participants had completed a degree, certification program or apprenticeship program in high school or shortly after and continued in the field of their training. Many more had 'found' their career success somewhat accidentally: they became aware of training and advancement opportunities once on the job. These unconventional, nonlinear pathways were particularly notable in the Detroit area focus groups where very few were hired given their education, training or earned credentials and instead were promoted once, as an employee, gained on the job experience or completed professional training.

In some instances (as explained later), their employers were instrumental in identifying educational and career opportunities. For others, coworkers or more simply, workplace experience generated an awareness of ways to move forward with their current employer or career field. Most advanced step by step – often with twists and turns - without a defined, final career position in mind.

- **A Military Start**

For many, the military was a postsecondary career entry position. An average of two or three individuals in each group had served in a branch of the military. (Most had completed a four or six-year tour of duty). More than a few regretted not staying in the

service; they could see they would qualify for a retirement at an earlier age than what they now faced. With almost no exception, these military experiences were linked positively with career success. They learned discipline, acceptance of assigned work tasks, to follow authority, to value teamwork and to stay focused and on task. They uniformly recognized that these skills have served them well as civilians.

Dealing with people, as far as, in the Army is not really tolerated, if you are doing a service for someone. You don't give no one attitude or something like that. It helped if someone was coming at me in a hostile manner. If someone comes and say, "Hey, we need this done, you know this and this and this I am more likely to say, "Cool. I got you,: instead of getting rowdy back with them— (5)

I came from a Marine Corps mentality where you did it because it was your job. Say there's a forklift driver here, there's a forklift driver there. He's sitting on his (rear) listening to the radio. Truck comes into the dock, it's not his dock, but there are three of them. This guy goes to unload that truck, it'll take an hour, but if all of you get in and start doing it it'll go, so I'll go over and say, "I need all you guys to get on that truck." "That's not my job! Blah blah blah." "I'm not asking you to pick up a mop, I'm saying do you job. You're paid eight hours, do it." Anyway, I was like, "I'll never supervise again." I've got to find a job that goes along with my military retirement until I finish school. (7)

The transformation from the military world to the civilian world is like night and day. In the military if somebody says, "Get down," you literally get down because if you take the time to ask why you'll probably get shot. You get the mindset of, "I'm not telling you this because I'm bullying you, I'm telling you this because it needs to be done." You get in the mindset of doing things because they need to be done. In my house, my son lives with me. If I come into the kitchen and dishes are there I'm going to put the dishes in the dishwasher, not because somebody's telling me, not because I'm being forced to. It needs to be done so I'm going to do it. Sunday morning, I get up, I cut the grass. Why? Because I need to cut the grass. The civilian world does not work like that. Everybody wants a hookup or a skating through it and they think that they're owed. Especially the new generation. I hate to say the millennials, they think that everything is owed to them. (7)

- **Simple and Straightforward**

Single Employer / Career Field – Quite a few employees (especially some of the youngest) have worked for one employer or stayed in a single, narrow career field for their entire career to date. That said, not very many had completed formal training in high school or immediately after in preparation for their current career field. For some, their career success is a function of truly loving their jobs and employers. Some

mentioned feeling lucky to have landed where they did. For others, they don't necessarily love their jobs, but they value the fact they are employed and heading toward retirement, which is a significant disincentive to change employers. Some others had spent most of their working lives in a single field (e.g. graphic design or healthcare) but had changed positions with either the same employer or with competitors. For the most part, any changes in employers or career field were self-chosen, not forced upon them. (Note: this is not to imply that some of these employees did not suffer significant job dissatisfaction or frustration; instead they tended to have fewer moves of their own volition.)

I got my associate's degree in restaurant management. I didn't really care for that so I went into trucking. I got my license through a trucking school and got this job 16 years ago. I've been there ever since. (1)

I'm the night-time supervisor for the City of North Tonawanda. I've been there 35 years now, just a little over. Right out of high school. I got the job a couple of years ago. When it comes to water breaks I go out and check it. Call the crews and tell them what to do. (1)

I'm a mechanic by trade. I've done that all my life, right out of high school. No college at all. I went into the dealership and they sent me to almost all of the onboard schools that they offer. I was there for about 15 years and then I went to the town of Tonawanda. It was the Parks Department I was at, which has now merged into one big department. I've been there for over 25 years. (1)

I started at my company when I was 25 in the mail room. I went through the customer service department, then I moved to an implementation. How did that happen? That just doesn't happen. You're in the mailroom, you're hidden away, right? No, I was originally intended to be customer service but the guy that ran the mailroom takes the same three week vacation every year. It just so happened before my position started I trained with him first and did that for a couple weeks to help out. Then I started in customer service and I went to an implementation assistance where they were bringing new business in. Then I was an administrative assistant, and then in 2008 I became an administrator. Now I'm a senior administrator and I train other people to be assistants in our department. (2)

I work for the state highway department. I'm the supervisor up there for road crews. How long have you been doing that? Thirty-five years. Came out of high school and applied for a job. Got a job. Back then, it was jobs that were undesirable. Nobody wanted them. Started out as a laborer there, doing you name it. Worked my way up over the years from that through mechanics through equipment operators through, you name it, to where I am now. (3)

I am a mammographer at Roswell Park Cancer Institute. I've been an X-ray tech for longer than I care to admit. I've been doing mammography for about 20. (3)

I work for David Chevrolet up in Niagara Falls, so if you need a tour tomorrow I'll be there. (Laughter.) I'm the parts department manager. I've been working for them for 26 years. Unheard of in the auto business. Previously, I started in '77 at another dealership in Buffalo, which is closed now. I've been in auto dealerships since '77. (3)

I didn't start as a cook. I started as a substitute.I'd come in and I'd fill in in the dishroom washing dishes....Then from there, I moved up to a, not full time, but permanent dishwasher. Then a server, and then a cashier, and then assistant cook, and then the cook. When someone would leave, I would apply for the position. (4)

I'm an electronics technician. I work currently as a civilian employee at the U.S. Army. My duties are with the crash dummies. The actual electronic crash dummies that measure injury. I've done that job for four years now. The 22 years before that I was always in the automotive industry, crashing cars, vehicles, bicycles. You name it, there's a safety standard for everything, and they all use some type of crash dummy and data acquisition ... (5)

I work for Sinai-Grace Hospital DMC. I am a patient enrolling associate. ... before that? I worked for an ear, nose and throat private practice for seven years...and before that (I worked for another medical practice). I was everything (laughs) I was the assistant. I did the prescriptions before he reviewed them. Sterilizing. We consult the patient's over in the hospital. I was his minion. (6)

I am a project manager in IT. I work for Ally Financial in downtown Detroit. I've been a project manager for about eight years. I was a project coordinator in between. With a different company or the same? Mm-hmm (agreement), with a different company. I can give you a little bit about my career path. I started my career at EDS, which is no longer around, it was bought by HP. I spent 10 years with them. After that, I was contacted, I was just telling some people this story, by a headhunter and I moved out to California to work for the Department of Defense, for the Pentagon. I was a project manager out there. Then, I did that for four years, and I'm a single parent so we moved back home to Michigan because I'm originally from here. That was in 2011. It was hard to find a job, it took me about six months. I've never had that much of a problem in finding a job. (7)

I work at Mode One Transportation and Logistics. I am considered business development. I have a lot of odd jobs, so I'm in a group of my own. I don't work in a certain department. What did you do before? I worked for Middleman Trucking Company, so I always worked in logistics and transportation. This is the first job that I've been on that, but I'm not a dispatcher. (8)

Dissatisfaction Driven Change - At least a handful of participants changed jobs or career fields because they were unhappy with their current job. For some, they disliked their supervisor. For others, the job itself was not intrinsically rewarding or was in fact irritating. Others simply sought jobs with higher wages, better benefits or more pleasant working environments. Sometimes a lateral move to another employer achieved those goals; other times it required a diagonal or vertical career change with a different employer or a shifting to a different field entirely.

My drive was just to have a job with benefits that would let me retire at a decent age... I'm a maintenance worker. I got sick of making cheap money and not getting any benefits. A guy that I worked with went to truck driving school, and it sounded like a great thing. See the country, get paid to see the country. Go wherever. I didn't go see the country. I stayed local. I had relatives that were politically connected so I applied where I could and had a political connection to get me in. (1)

It wasn't layoffs, it was more of the management I was working under was driving everyone bonkers. When I was working at Best Buy, not up here, it was downstate. I don't know about the stores up here. I'm sure they're great. The management team we had, they kept changing, corporate would say, I was a supervisor of the computer department. They're like, "Focus on this this week." "Great." "Hey guys, we're going to focus on selling whatever, or selling protection plans on the computers. Make sure we're pushing this, explain, blah blah blah." Next week, "We're focusing on this, now." It's like, "We just started making progress. Why are we doing that?" You'd get yelled at, "You didn't make progress here." "You didn't give us time to develop." The management seemed very bipolar and it was a lot of stress and I was—... I was frustrated. I was like, "You know what, I need a decent job." I started looking around. I had a friend who was working at Geico in Long Island. He's like, "Interview, see where it goes." I went in there, and this was 13 years ago so you actually had to go into the place, sit down, fill out the application there and wait. Someone finally saw you. I was there probably for four hours that first day, had an interview with someone and they asked me to come back the following week, had another round of interviews. They asked me to come back the following week, I had a final set of interviews, sat down with someone listened to them do the job, met with the manager who said, "Do you think you can do this job?" They did a sell me a pen routine. They said, "Nurse's office is over there. Go get drug screened and everything like that and we'll see you in three weeks when training starts." I knew I was in a bad scenario. (2)

The girls I was working with at another car dealership, because now years have gone by, they said, "Why would you want to leave this job? You make pretty good money." I said, "Yes, but I don't get any benefits really." (4)

Money as the main reason (why I moved). I needed health insurance so I needed a job that provided the health insurance. I wasn't getting full-time. (6)

As would be expected, finding a new job while fully employed was often very demanding. But for those who were truly dissatisfied, they did what was needed to prepare for and land a better job.

No, I did it (truck driving school) on weekends. I worked full-time Monday through Friday at the job I had, and Saturday and Sunday I did it on weekends. It took me six months. They made it easy for you. Finance it. Get student loans and do what you've got to do to get your license. I got my license and this job I've kept it because it's one of those things where it's not a job, it's a career. I really enjoy doing what I'm doing. I plow snow in the wintertime, and I do odd stuff all summer long. (1)

Actually, I took the job because I was annoyed with the doctor I was working for, who had agreed to one pay increase and gave me a different one when the check came, so that's why I left. On principle. Frankly, the amount didn't really matter as much as (the respect for getting it). I was angry and I was getting a different job, and that's the job I got. He was deadset against it.... I looked online. I went to the library. I took the books out of the library. I went to the bookstore and said, "I'm not paying that," and went to the library and that was that.... I did because I was angry. My career choice came out of angry. (4)

Limited Advancement Opportunity - Some of our interviewees switched jobs given perceptions of nonexistent or limited promotional opportunities with their current employer. In a few cases, moving into a supervisory or management position necessitated a bachelor's degree. One young man shared with us that he started in production at a company that sews logos on work clothes. Having been promoted twice, first to line supervisor and then into management, he feels very happy and highly respected by his boss in his current position. His problem is the company for whom he works, which is family owned with simply no more promotional opportunities for him as a non-family member. He knew he would need to move to another company to have opportunities for advancement.

As a general rule, when our participants were unhappy with their current place of employment, they kept at it while looking for a better alternative. Even though their

time was limited, they explored alternatives on their days off and during other periods of free time.

When I switched from production manager to head of customer service that was because one of the employees from the customer service department had left. We hired somebody new and they were terrible. There was damage control that needed to be done. It wasn't necessarily that I was forced, but because I was a part of the management team and it's not a huge company, it was pretty much I moved into that position to help out the company. It was more to help out the company. It wasn't necessarily a forced thing, but it's similar to what you were talking about.I was happy to make the move. As a production manager you've pretty much hit the ceiling in production. I knew that there was more opportunity. I knew that this was going to be it for production. I also strategically placed myself there because I knew I would be able to move myself up in the office more than I'd be able to move myself up in production. I strategically tried to get that position and offered my services in order to advance my career. (2)

- **Volatile and Unpredictable**

Given the wide range of ages, from the mid-twenties to early sixties, we heard many stories of individuals who had (by choice or circumstance) experienced a significant number of job and career field changes. For some – particularly those over forty – their career paths involved several jobs with various employers. We heard some quite engaging and compelling stories where our participants faced major personal events triggering the need or desire to change jobs or career fields. In other instances, the employer forced the moved.

I manage a business office for a religious community. How long have you been there? Eleven years. What did you do before then? Before that, I managed the accounting office at an adult care facility. Before that, I was at a home healthcare supply company for two years. In between that, I was at a electrical company that they install electrical fixtures. I was there for two years, then before that, the health care. Before that, I was a roofer for nine years. Before that, I was mainly accounting type jobs, but in the construction industry. (3)

I got laid off. God, my career path has been all over the place. It was odd because I worked at Northtown Automotive Center just up the street. I've lived in Canada. I was pregnant and I finished my term, I went on maternity leave. When I was supposed to go back, I called my boss and I was like, "Yes, I got cleared to come back." I did my six weeks or eight weeks of what maternity leave was. He's like, "I don't have your job." I'm like, "It's against the law for you

not to." I hung up and the Monday, it might have been the next day, I drove into the city and went file for unemployment, and I stopped at a dealership I used to work at just a year prior. My old boss says, "Let's go for lunch, it's great to see you." He's like, "When are you starting back to work?" I said, "I got laid off, I was here to collect unemployment." He goes, "How can you get laid off? You were on maternity leave." I lost that job and my old boss hired me back because in the year I was gone, they went through four people who couldn't handle the job. He's like, "I have to have you back." I said, "You could have just kept me if you would have gave that lousy \$0.50 an hour." Back in the day, you're pushing for everything you can get. At some point, I decided to take the civil service exam, and I scored really lousy. (4)

I'm an assembly worker for Fiat Chrysler at the ... truck plant where we make the Ram truck. How long have you been there? Four years. What did you do before that, Kevin? Before I was in the ministry for 15 years. Before that, I worked at a small radio station in northern Michigan. Before that, as I started my work career, I worked for WDIB, Wooden Tiger Baseball, I used to be on there traveling with the Tigers doing producing work for them. (5)

Family / Life Events - Several men and women in our groups told us they stayed in jobs they don't really love because of a practical need to earn a living or, sometimes more importantly, to secure health insurance and other benefits for themselves and their families. Unexpected life events forced many to pursue different jobs or change career fields. Sometimes these events were negatively stressful (e.g. divorce, death, health issues) and other times unforeseen opportunities and positive events (e.g. marriage or the birth of a child) induced employment changes. One man noted he lost his job as a minister resulting from having an affair with one of his congregation members. Not only did this affair cost him his job but also lead to his divorce. He was forced to accept a job as a laborer to generate much needed income. Currently he's in a different manual labor job and regrets his affair. Others noted the need to work to pay for changing family needs. Those individuals stated that they might prefer working in a different field, but could not risk losing a stable income and benefits. A few turned challenging life events into opportunities to start their own business. We heard at least two examples of non-profit organizations spurred by job loss or other life events.

I didn't have so many jobs before I became more of a man. I had a daughter too, so I had to really step it up. ...Yes, I had a daughter. I got real serious with applying. Yes, I started applying more. I sharpened up my resume. I got more professional and really started working on the tools to be successful.... I had a

lot of different training. One job I got, I've got martial arts training. That's one training that I have. I used to teach. That helped me get one job because he felt I should have some calmness and be able to deal with people because of this training. That helped too, but it was more persistence than wanting it, tired of settling for less. (1)

We started going to a church in Kent County, Michigan, and it was small. They had a Christian school, a food bank, and everybody belonged to it from Gladwin. I found myself helping them more and more, and the next thing you know, they had an opportunity for me to do stuff in their school, to do stuff in their ministry. I capped the radio gig for a little bit and still did the church work, and then all of a sudden, the church work turned like, "Man we could use you all the time." As things went well at the church in Flint, more in Michigan noticed and wanted me to come on staff with them full-time and offered to provide housing in the Flint area. I took it. My wife quit teaching and we moved to Flint, and she got a job at a Christian school. As I went, a well-known bigger church in Taylor Michigan downriver needed help, and that's where I went. I spent 15 years there. I end up having an affair with a lady in the church, lost my church, lost my family. After I got out, an old man from the church called to check on me. One of the very few, and said, "What do you need?" I said, "I really need a job." I picked up a quick gig with waste management. I had a CDL from driving the church bus. I started driving garbage trucks in the summer, and they laid me off when the yard waste ran out in December. This guy called right around past the new year, and I knew if I didn't have to go back to waste management, I wasn't going to in the spring. (5)

It was, but I was at a point in my life I had to learn or I was going to be in trouble. I had a wife and four kids, so I have to perform. I had a lot of good people in my life who showed me and teach me things in my young career. Once I finally figured it out for myself, I took on any and every job I can. I tell these other guys I wanted to go learn everything. (5)

I liked it, but I will say the biggest determining factor was when I had my two-year-old back in 2014. I decided that I didn't want to do any more deployments, all that type of stuff. I'm married. (5)

My background, I was born and raised in southwest Detroit. My dad was a police officer down there. He retired and took us up north. We actually built a house and he did all the electrical work and it actually intrigued me, because we did everything. We ran 4,000 feet of wire. It's something that I always wanted to do and when I first got out of high school, I had to get a job. My mom ended up getting cancer and everything, so that's why I got into the health field. I was actually going to college for an electrician and I got one semester in and then it started going south for her so I stopped going to school. I just basically did that and picked up another job, just to help with everything. She ended up passing away, so then basically after that is when I went to the hospital and I never pursued after that. (6)

I'm the creator a non-profit, Lupus Detroit..... My dad lost to lupus 15 years ago, and that's why I had to stop college. I went through all of the classes for journalism at Florida A&M. I was diagnosed with (some form of disease). Once I got better, I became a flight attendant. I did that for six years. I decided to go back to Tallahassee to do eyelashes. I got sick again, so I had to come back to Detroit and started Lupus Detroit. (8)

I worked in education with the youth for the past 11 years. I started off as an assistant. I, later on, became a behavior specialist, behavior management. I also worked as a youth coordinator and a youth supervisor over at a local residential facility, Crest Child House. ...That's what I had been doing for the last 11 years. Recently, our school closed and I have started a non-profit a couple of years ago, Phoenix Success, so I would say founder of Phoenix Success. That's something that I'm pursuing now full-time, after the school closed, where we provide youth services, as far as resume workshops and college applicational building things, resources to afford our youth... (8)

Forced Job Loss - When developing the moderator guide to direct the focus groups, it was believed that many adults – particularly those over 35 – may have suffered from extended or very stressful periods of unemployment tied to factors outside of their control, including outsourcing of jobs, emerging technologies and other disruptions caused by an extended weak economy. Though we heard about experiences tied to layoffs, the extent of forced unemployment was less common than expected. Not surprisingly – especially among the older group participants – plant closings, mergers, acquisitions, off-shore job movements and other corporate decisions have indeed caused job losses. A few participants also mentioned having to make difficult choices when forced to relocate.

When I worked at Westinghouse for 10 years they were moving departments to North Carolina, Mexico and of course I wasn't moving there. That was the first time I had to make a job change. (3)

I used to work for a health insurance company four years ago. It was WellCare. They laid off everybody in New York State, 200 or something people. No forewarning, no nothing, just called me into the office and said, "Here's your severance pay," which sucked, and let everybody go. I could not believe it. What did you do, Tonya? I enjoyed my unemployment for six months, and then went and got my job at UnitedHealthcare, where I did Medicare there. I was doing Medicare sells at WellCare. I was already doing Medicare sales, and it was really devastating because it was a six figure salary that I was making. To

go from a salary commission bonus, to just commission, that was just devastating. I still can't believe it. (4)

What happened was The Guidance Center, they outsource everything because of the lack of state funding. In 2009 they did the first big cut. Then because they couldn't keep all the payroll, they outsourced all the employees ...even though I still had my same case load it was just through a different company. I had to reapply. They matched the pay. They matched the benefits. Because I was with The Guidance Center for so long, I had personal benefits in my package. (6)

When probed to describe the impact of these forced layoffs or transfers, we learned our participants turned to a wide variety of sources to find a new job. Many took advantage of unemployment benefits and resources (for example “Michigan Works”) to beef up their interviewing skills and improve their resumes. Some had spouses who helped them apply to a variety of available positions. Most relied heavily on their network of friends, family and colleagues. Most importantly, they simply did not give up until they landed a job, even if the position accepted was less than ideal and potentially offered a lower pay rate and weaker benefits package.

That's the same for me. I would never forget, it was in 2011. We already knew our department was going to be leaving somewhat. I will never forget I was in Florida, my son was graduating that year. We went to Walt Disney because he was going off to college. That was our family trip at that time. I got a call and, “We're about to get laid off.” I had already with my job, did a lot of overtime, so I was already getting myself prepared. In the same sense, I was like, “What am I going to do?” I had a plan, I was ready. I didn't want to do customer service anymore, so I did a lot of overtime, paid up bills. At that point, I had no education background and I know a lot of jobs are requiring that, so I said, “You know what? This is my opportunity to go back to school.” (4)

For my whole career, I crashed cars, worked with the crash dummies. For a year and a half, I worked for the crash dummy manufacturers. There were two of them in the world. Then the downturn and two companies became one. They had two complete staffs. One staff had to go. Of course, I had the bullseye on my back, so they let me go. I was married, five kids, without a job. What did you do? Thank God I had a good name in the community. I went to TRW Automotive, Auto ...all the tier one suppliers on Logan Street and looked for anybody that had an open position in the crash-related, technical, technician job. There was one and it was the low man on the pole. I took a cut in half of my salary, still with a wife and five kids. I really had to perform then. (5)

No, the company did not get sold off until I was an employee again. I was laid off because my job went overseas, offshoring they call it, to India. I went on unemployment. Was that stressful? Yes. What did you do? How did you prepare to get another job? You're a mom, you have a son. I looked for a job every day, went to unemployment, I went to Michigan Works. I did use them for job hunting. It was useful, it was helpful. I wish that I would've utilized the free schooling. They would've paid for you school if you went back at the time, and I didn't. Why didn't you? I don't know. That's a good question. I wish that I would've because I was focused... I needed to have a job. Unemployment only gives you so much money and I needed to pay my bills, otherwise I wouldn't be able to afford my house. (7)

I am a service coordinator for Douglas Electric Company. We're an electrical contractor. I've been in this field since I was 19. I've been there six years next month. The company prior to that was Corby Energy Services, and I did the same thing for 16 years. Theirs was mostly residential. In 2008, when the housing market crashed, I got laid off and I took the opportunity to go back to school to pursue an associate's degree in hospitality, travel, and tourism. It could also be for a different field. Being unemployed, you have to put your resume through, and the software that I knew from my previous job, I was the only one in the database with that software, and that's the software that Douglas was looking for somebody to have the knowledge of, so they hired me. (8)

I was in Michigan Works. I was a part of a system. I had to apply to so many and I had to have my resume available They force you to put your resume out there so that people would look for you. At the rate that I got laid off at, it was impossible to find a job at that point because I wanted too much. They kept telling me, "You have to lower it." I'm like, "That's where I was." Eventually, when I did lower it, I started getting called, but they weren't the opportunities I was looking for. When I finally did take one, it was an afternoon shift, which totally didn't work for me. I did what I had to do until I fit where I need to be, where I am not. (8)

B) FACTORS IMPACTING CAREER SUCCESS

Following participant introductions, we asked a series of questions designed to identify and explore individual characteristics likely correlated with the career success of our respondents.

1. Personal Qualities

As might be expected from participants who share a minimum level of ‘success’ (defined by an individual annual income of at least \$40,000 or \$50,000), we were able to identify several common personal attributes.

- **Natural Aptitudes, Knowledge, Skills & Abilities**

Although lacking a four-year college degree, many of our participants were naturally intelligent and possessed a wide array of talents which empowered their ability to excel at work. They used their innate intelligence to master requirements of their jobs and in many cases, went above and beyond the minimum required to be a top performer.

Good “People Skills” - More than a few shared they had strong ‘people skills’ and good communication abilities. Others were compassionate with a strong customer service orientation. They connected these attributes with career satisfaction and success.

I would say without a doubt my knack is to be able to communicate with people. That was the one thing that allowed me to rise above everyone else. Yes, I did know within myself. I personally put a lot of effort into that trait. I read a lot. I would buy self help books and things like that in order to educate myself. (2)

I think I’m detail oriented. I’m a strong personality person. If I have something to say you’re probably going to hear it from my mouth. I feel like opening your mouth helps to move yourself along the path. I consider myself a smart person even though I only graduated high school. It comes with the job. (2)

I like to talk to people and make sure they’re okay. I have a caring personality, you would say. (3)

I started as a PCA, but I’ve been a nurse for 17 years. Yes. I’ve always wanted to be a nurse, even since when I was a little girl. It’s always something I wanted to do. It’s what my one profession was was to be a nurse. You’ve got to have the heart for it. It’s not something that anybody can do. You put up with a lot. You take a lot. You don’t get paid what you need to get paid. Your heart’s really has to be into it. (3)

I get along with people. I work with people well. If there’s a problem in the dealership with another department or customer, I can usually smooth that out. No, I think that’s natural. Let’s just say, you have to be there. (3)

I just wanted to do that. I knew I wasn't for medical. I did not have the stomach for it. It was exciting. I'm good with people. I like customer service. I just thought, "I'm going to do that." During college, we took a civil service exam, and within a year I got hired. I got promoted early on. I was doing different things at the department. It wasn't the same basic job over and over. I love customer service. I love dealing with public. I love the sportsman. I love working with the police. Every day is different. I love it. I truly love my job. (3)

I'm a people person, so I work out of the community and I like to deal with the community and the people. I love my job. I love this because it's different every day. I have different sites within the community. I go to several different sites and just educate the community on the importance of having health insurance. What are the downfalls, what are the upsides to having medical coverage, because you have so many people of the community that tell you that they don't need health insurance because they don't get sick. I try to explain to them, "It only takes one incident where everything that you worked for, you could lose." Plus, I've worked on both fields. I've worked in the Medicare section, and I've worked in the Medicaid section. From conception to 100 plus. (4)

Strong Technical Abilities - Many of our participants had strong 'hard skills'. Whether a great spot welder, accurate contractor estimator, adept at shaving, a fast typist or gifted with a natural grasp of technology, they had attributes valued by their employers and important to their personal career success. They easily grasped and tackled sometimes challenging and ever-changing job responsibilities.

You've been with the same company for a long time, right, 20 years you said? What's helped you stay there for 20 years? There's a lot of companies who haven't kept people for that long. I think, for being an estimator being accurate, organized. While I was going to Erie Community College companies would call in the college looking for interns or part time help. I applied for one of them and got it. I called right away, before the day was done and I had an interview the next day. What's helped you move forward and stay at the company for 20 years? I guess being reliable. A lot of people move around in construction. I guess adapting. The Nintendo, I used to do the same thing, I just could never get it to work again (laughter.) Maybe you can help me. It sounds so stupid. I realized when I was applying for a job that I watched MacGyver when I was a kid. It was my favorite show I've ever seen. The way he used to (just fix things) (2)

My mom currently works in the court system, so I had always been exposed to the court system, that type of thing. I really liked the criminal side of it, so I went to school after I finished my first year at Mercyhurst. I went to the court reporting school right in Buffalo, on Main Street. I gave that a go and it worked out really well. There's a very high dropout rate. I was only one of two out of about 35 that started the program. (4)

I'm more of a hands-on person. To calculate the math off of our equipment of orders when they give you a piece of paper and they tell you to break this down from the fraction to the decimals without using the computer system. I'm not using the computer. I use everything by hand. ...I liked math probably at 13 when I was about in eighth grade. (5)

I've always been mechanically inclined, even when I was a kid. My dad would be like, "Hand me a 9/16th, hand me this wrench." He always allowed me as a kid to play with his tools. I was probably nine years old with a soldering gun, which nobody would do nowadays. Let a nine-year-old solder welders together and stuff like that. (5)

I'm alright. There are some stressful situations where I'm called up to the OR to take these X-rays for the surgeons. There are times of stress. As far as if I'm good at it, I seem to be good at it. (6)

Why have they kept me? Because I'm good. I'm good at my typing that I do. I went to school for it years and years ago. I went to school for data entry type. I had a computer way back, old type. I love to type. (6)

The reason why I think I'm good at my job is because I get a lot of compliments from the doctors on shaves. Certain doctors like, especially if people are hairy, certain doctors— Doctors like their shaves certain ways. I talked to a lot of doctors being in the locker room and everything because a lot of the doctors are nice. I talk to them all the time, ask them what they like. A lot of times I do what they ask so I get a lot of compliments from that. (6)

It's just the fact that the machine that I run, everybody hates it because no one hits mark ever. ... Yes. Then this machine is raggedy. Once you learn it, you have to perfect it because otherwise, you're going to mess up parts and you're going to get in trouble. ... I hit mark the third day, and my boss couldn't believe it. He said, "You're not leaving. You're going to run this machine every day." One day, I had court. I got there about 12:00 and everybody said, "You came to work? You're crazy." I love my job, so I went. He said, "Get your butt in there and change your clothes now. Nobody could run the machine and I just love it. It's my baby. (8)

Creative Problem Solving / Multi-tasking – Another skill set common to many, was the able to multi-task and look for creative solutions to sometimes perplexing job challenges. The ability to deal with high-pressure situations also describes many. Particularly impressive was the drive by many to think outside of the box, to consider alternative approaches to solving demanding job requirements or improving operational efficiency.

I could never do the science part of it, but that kind of thinking, problem solving. I can find an easier way to do anything. Any task you give me I'll find an easier way to do it. I always put that on a resume and they'll ask me why, "Show me an example." I can't an interview because I don't know what they do and how they're doing things, but I would show them if I got it. I have here, where I am now, where I came in to the chagrin of some of the people there I found easier ways to do what they do now. People that have been there a long time didn't really like that so much. Sometimes, you said about holding back is one of the problems (laughter). (2)

(As a 911 operator...) I'm very good at multitasking and being under pressure. I've been trained very well to get you to calm down and tell me what's wrong. I'm good at that. ...That comes from the county. Well, part of it's from trauma ICU. When I got the job that I have now, I already brought to that what I had learned in the high pressure situations of working where I did in the hospital. I was clerical staff there. I was on the floor with the nurses and the doctors. I dealt with family members and patients. It was my job to put lab orders in for STAT labs. When somebody's coding, it's a pressure cooker. I found moving from social services, family and child services, to 911 was a much better move for me pace-wise. Value-wise, how I felt valued and the importance of the job. (4)

- **Intrinsic Values & Personality Traits**

More than educational and work history credentials, individual values and efforts that directed career success were highly valued.

Work Ethic – A critically important and very common characteristic of our participants was the possession of a strong work ethic. They're likely to show up early, stay late, and take ownership of their job responsibilities. They also understand and respect the importance of teams, of doing your share or more to help your group of coworkers meet and exceed job requirements. Many shared stories of doing much more than the minimum required. If they saw a task needing attention, they were apt to jump in and help, even if it was not required of them. For a few, this commitment lead to resentment from coworkers who did not share the same sense of responsibility. Nevertheless, most of our employees truly cared about exceeding employer expectations and honestly cared about the needs of their employers and fellow employees. Though they valued validation by coworkers and superiors, they take pride in their accomplishments and did not need to be recognized for their contributions.

Every job position I had, they had training when you start and you pick up things. You learn as you go and you pick up habits from other people, and you take that to the next place, and you take that to the next place, and on and on. I've had jobs where you have to do over the phone issues and I've had jobs where it's face to face with a customer right then and there, so you immediately have to listen to what their problem is, try to figure out how to help and give the best advice and the best support. That helps me with what I'm doing now because I believe in what we do. Everybody needs insurance. It's pretty much, they're going to let me set up a table. It may not be the right place or the right time. Hard working, diligent. From collections, people tell you no all the time. They say no here, they'll say yes down the street. You keep moving. (2)

No, I've pretty much figured it out on my own over the years. I've been a supervisor there for 27 years. I'm the top person there.You try to figure it out, and you try to mold things the best way you can for the job you have to do, because when you have a job to do— Everybody knows when you have a snowstorm, you have to take care of what you have to care of. You can't have this guy coming in saying, "I don't want to do that." You have a job to do. You have to take care of it. There are a lot of people depending on what you have to do. You have to do your job. (3)

Examples of good leadership skills are, I don't need someone to tell me what to do. I know what's supposed to be done. I just take on a role of doing what needs to be done that I've seen that it's not done. That's one of the characteristics that my boss likes about me and wants me to stay because when he leaves, he knows I can run the office. He knows I can run the office, so he really counts on me to get a lot of things done. I don't need anyone to look over me to get work done, basically. (4)

I feel like I'm there, even though sometimes the cases are very sad. I hear a lot of sad stuff. I feel like it's my job to get the record down accurately and let the witness tell their story, and make sure that I type it accurately.I just knew that I wanted it and I wasn't a quitter. I wasn't going to give up. I just put the time in. (4)

You might come to work and you might not want to work. He might want to work. That's a conflict of interest. I've got to resolve that or I might have to work for one of you. I've got to be patient and see what's going to happen. I can't just get upset because you might have had a bad day or a bad night. You might have barely gotten sleep. (5)

We work four 10-hour days a week. Start at 5:00 in the morning and go to 3:30, with four 12-minute breaks and one half hour break through that whole 10 hours, and they want to run over 60 trucks an hour. It is endurance and starting at my age, I have only been there for four years, it's been something. The endurance keeps going. (5)

For today, I had to leave here to make sure I was here on time, and they catch me on the way out. They said this patient needs a primary care doctor, can you set them up? I'm like really, I've got a lot of stuff going on, so I go back and I put my things down. I go in and make sure... I see what appointments are available, make them an appointment, go to their room and take them the appointment just to get back to catch the shuttle. That was just one scenario, but that's everyday, all day. If they need me to cover a lunch, I'm always like yes, I don't mind. Where did that come from? Working my last job. Working with a doctor and having so many different jobs to do. Following behind him, going to the hospital, writing prescriptions, answering phones. I think it just came from wanting to be busy and doing something. (6)

They just do it. That's real important. To me the most important thing is you've got to work as a team no matter where you are. Where I work at everybody's a team. I can turn around and have something cooking on the stove and I know somebody else is going to watch it and I'm going to do the same for her. (7)

As a manager you're always doing something that's probably out of your task. Some of the employees, they might not finish a job, so that's your responsibility to make sure that's complete. I go over and I complete the job. It's always someone who probably doesn't know the job to its fullest. you do your part trying to make sure that this person can get the job as quick as he can. (7)

Yes. It just seems natural, though. it's natural. I take pride in everything I do, especially if it's something where it's like, "Ugh (displeased)." I never want to have a job where I'm just like, "Ugh (displeased), I have to go to work." Even if it's like that, I'm going to try to make the best out of it because if you live life like that, then it's always going to be, "Ugh (displeased)," type of day every day. (8)

Ambition & Self-Initiative - Many participants exhibited signs of confidence and strong character. They impressed us with their positive attitudes to succeed no matter the barriers placed in front of them. If they thought something could be done to help their employer be more productive or efficient, they weren't afraid to speak up and take the reins to implement new and better ways of doing things. A few examples were particularly memorable. One woman noted that in her capacity to order and distribute a wide array of supplies (for a university) she quickly learned there was a very poor system to track and manage inventory. Her response: work with her team and managers to create an inventory control system. Another respondent shared she was responsible for training new hires or individuals promoted to positions where their responsibilities differed from their previous jobs. This woman told us there were virtually no training materials nor a formal transition process in place. So she took it

upon herself to craft materials and processes to transition employees more effectively into new positions. Many were also clearly ambitious. They want more responsibility, better jobs with higher salaries, more control and autonomy.

Not necessarily the current job I have, but the job that I had before I started doing that had a lot of technology. I was able to manipulate the system and learn the system quickly. As I was getting promoted, I started dabbling or was interested in the scheduling part of it. I saw who was doing it and I was having them teach me. I learned it, the position came up, I was able to become a scheduler for my department. Then as a position opened up in the production planning where we scheduled a bit bigger I was able to jump right into that. (1)

What prompted you to read those self help books? Ambition. I thought that it would make a difference in my career, in my life. I shouldn't even say my career. I didn't think that I would go up, like you said, up the ladder in this company like I did. I thought that this was a stepping stone, but because of the things that got presented to me I went with it. When I first started to read those books it wasn't because of my current career, it was because I wanted to do better. (2)

I do want to change. I do want to eventually go as a radiologist as an MD or DO, because as much as I like being a tech, I don't have to worry too much. I don't have too much responsibilities, I just get to take pictures. I feel like I have sort of a lavish lifestyle in my head that I want to play out maybe in the future. (6)

In this company, in this position, the leaders indirectly mentored me. I learned from my errors, they critiqued. I didn't take it personally. I retain, I learn, I listen, I watch, I ask questions, I take risks. I'll go ahead and probably represent them with an answer to someone, speak on their behalf, and take chances, draft an agenda or write a correspondence or author a correspondent for the president. Just do things, go into the office or clean up their office or order things. (7)

Yes, I'm very proactive. Initiative and ask questions. They mentored me. A couple of months ago we were talking and I gave them direction, a response to something. I said, "You all groomed me to represent the organization. You groomed me, this culture." (7)

In five to 10 years, I'll be a master's in public administration. Having a Lupus Nashville, a Lupus Houston, and there is a lupus problem also in Sierra Leone, so maybe just going to Africa too. I want to be a published author. I want to, with a degree, be more involved in health policy and law. Things like that. I've spoken before the FDA in Bethesda before, so I like to lobby and things like that. That's the plan. (8)

We heard some very engaging stories of hurdles that had to be overcome. Whether landing a job demanded getting to the right person, or getting promoted necessitated

making others aware of your interests and talents, some of our more successful participants did whatever was needed to move forward.

You've got to know the right people, that's all that matters. Who you know.....You know, "Hi. How are you doing? Here's my application. Here's blah, blah, blah." His buddy knows all the shortcuts. He goes, "Go to the garage sale, buy some golf clubs. They're golfing this day." He went to the golf course. He said, "Mention my name. Knock on this door." He went and the next day, he got hired. Bought golf clubs at a garage sale. Sweet, isn't it? (1)

Yes, they look at seniority then send me an email that you've been denied the position by somebody— I just kept on it every time. I kept calling a guy from corporate. Just bugging him. It came to a point because of my last name. We'll call it persistence. I don't have a normal last name so he knew who I was. I knew when I read the minimum qualifications and everything that I had those qualifications that they were looking for. (1)

Perseverance - Several individuals shared their jobs are often less than exhilarating, and are repetitious or otherwise minimally rewarding. That said, they show up for work every day, don't complain and made sure the job is completed to a high standard. They're also pro-active risk-takers; they tackle challenges and try new ways to doing things to improve their personal performances and help improve the productivity of their employers.

Some were irritated by coworkers, supervisors, mindless / bureaucratic requirements and other realities and chose to accept the irritations to just get their job done. Many accepted the fact that they had to put in the time, start with the worst tasks, earn the respect of coworkers and superiors. One example of this willingness to 'put in your time' came from a more senior African American male from Buffalo who is a corrections officer. He made it very clear that despite politics, budget, irate inmates and other stressors, he 'just does his job' and shows up each day to do what needs to be done. As described more below, many had been challenged by obstacles (e.g. personal or family health and financial issues or job loss / forced relocation) which mandated accepting undesirable positions or changing career fields entirely. Though clearly stressful, they did what was needed to land a new job or move forward with their current employers.

*On the job stuff, getting thrown into the fire. A lot of older guys don't take a lot of s*** from the younger guys. "Hey man, the door is over there if you don't want to do it. Go back to college. Be a pretty boy or something if you don't want to do construction work, it's cool." I put up with it. I kept my mouth shut most of the time. I did my job and worked my ass off. I did Potter's Road electrical program four years ago.... I paid my own way. It's like \$4,000. While I was operating full-time on East Aurora, so I'd drive there after work. Covered in mud, take my coveralls off. Do school for five hours. Take a test. Go home. Do it again. Did that for six months. (1)*

What got me up to this level was self-doubting myself. Every time you go to something, "Man, I don't know if I can do this." Then I challenged myself to learn it. Then when you learn it. "Oh man, it wasn't as bad as you thought it was." Now, I'm the king of it when I was scared of it. After telling yourself that repeatedly— Right. I don't know. It's a psych game to convince myself I can do it. For example, I'm about to get promoted. "These fools are about to promote me. I don't know what the hell I'm doing."(1)

It's what you want in life? How much do you want it? You've got to keep going and keep moving. ...It's got to be something motivating at the end of the day. It's motivation and drive. ...You've got to keep persisting. (1)

There's no school....I said, you just jump out of the airplane and build it on your way down. I didn't have a clue. I wanted to be the next Oprah. That was my plan going into Florida A&M. Life throws its lemons and you just make lemonade. I've been very fulfilled because through my organization, we award grants, and also emergency financial assistance to people who lupus in Michigan. That's very fulfilling. I can help people go to school. I can people pay their DTE bills and things like that. Then in an indirect way, you also inspire other people to chase their vision and their dreams to build non-profits. That makes me happy, too. Each one teaches one. Not to say that it was easy. One year, I had two strokes within a year. That just makes my resolve a bit more. It makes me want to work a little smarter, not harder. If I'm not good to myself, I can't be good to my members or other people. (8)

Adaptability & Preparation - A common characteristic of many of our interviewees was the importance they placed on adapting to meet the changing needs of their current position and to become qualified for future advancement opportunities. To improve their skills, they learned from others through both formal and informal training and often took it upon themselves to figure out how to master new challenges on their own. For some, this meant gaining certifications or studying for exams (e.g. Civil Service) which were requirements for promotions.

Many shared stories of continual efforts to learn; they feel strongly the need to continually and consistently improve their knowledge, skills and abilities. They took advantage of employer offered training, learned from watching coworkers and supervisors and pursued whatever knowledge and skills were necessary for promotion. This initiative and desire to learn was fairly pervasive among our many participants and clearly seemed a key factor tied to career advancement.

Quite clearly, many make themselves aware of the different skills, tests and other accomplishments which must be met to improve their chances of promotion. One notably impressive young woman was a court reporter. In her field, speed and accuracy are directly linked to career success. She told us she constantly practices to improve her typing skills and in fact had recently accepted a competitive position in Manhattan.

I took over the department like nine years ago, they combined two departments, so I had to put two together. Purchasing was never part of what I did previously, I was just the stat clerk and when it ran low, the order went through, it came in, we were blind. But now I do full-circle, which is not really right, and I've been trying to tell people. When I first took over, I'm in a man's world. There was no woman in that department ever. All the guys in all the shops thought it was their own personal Home Depot. When I got there, I was like, "No, we need to do an inventory." There was never an inventory done. Nothing was on the computer. I don't know how they kept track of the millions of dollars worth of inventory I have in my department. The guys pushed back, they didn't want to deal with me. Now things run a little smoother. ...They always used to say, "It's not your money, I don't know why you're so worried about it." I'm a taxpayer of the state of New York, and yes, it is my money. If I can save the money here, maybe somebody else will follow suit and say – Yes. I've implemented a computer system, a tracking system. The parts are now somewhat labeled with part numbers and with descriptions, so that when the guys come in, they have a work order, and it gets charged out to that work order. They know once it comes in, where it went, and what I have on the shelf and what I don't have on the shelf. (4)

No, it's all another test. I took a test, I scored the highest in the college on the test. Once you've taken your first civil service and I scored lousy, like I admitted before, you know what you need to do.I take every test that comes out. (4)

Currently I'm a web designer, graphic designer, printer. I've been in the field for over 25, going on 30 years now. I started off with offset printing back in high school. After high school I got hired in co-op through my company, which was an

engineering firm I was with. They're global wide, MSX International. I was with them for almost 25 years before, the same thing with Reggie. Back in '08 they took eight of us on a Friday afternoon, which is something I'll never forget, and said, "Hey, we don't need you anymore." I started off offset printing with them, and from that point they got rid of the offset department. I went into digital design, desktop publishing. I didn't even know how to turn a computer on. They gave me a choice after 10 years, either learn a computer or get laid off. I took the choice of learning the computer. I started off on a Mac and not a PC. I've been in computers now for almost 23, 24 years. (7)

Curiosity & Job Satisfaction– Most notable among some of the youngest participants but common among many, was a high-level of curiosity. They enjoy learning more about their own job, field of work, what can be done to help themselves and their employers succeed. A very common thread among our many participants was deep satisfaction with their chosen (or accidental) career field. They truly love their jobs and find their employment rewarding. Interestingly, even our oldest participants have far-ranging personal and professional interests and plan to pursue a different career field (often of an entrepreneurial or service orientation) in at least a part-time capacity once they retire from their current field.

More than anything else they want to learn (has made me successful), to go into the new generation of anything. If you're going to stay in the old technology you're never going to move forward. It was always an interest of mine to get into the computer stuff and take the bull by the horns and learn. In the automotive industry, it has grown a lot since I got out of school in '75. They were just bringing the computers into cars. Now, they are into everything that you touch with an engine, it's got a computer on it. Everything. (1)

When I lived in the DC area, I can't remember the company but their thing was, "What if." If you always ask what if and then you imagine the possibilities. That was one of my favorite things. At the State Department sometimes we had to get things, put them together, and come up with something else that it really wasn't designed for. (1)

I have a thirst and a quest for knowledge, and in the financial service industry, there's lots of knowledge out there. It's fast-paced, it's changing. Where else can you learn about something that you can apply to your family's lives. For your own well-being, for your insurance. I got my P&C license, that's property and casualty, because I have oversight responsibilities for— Were you required to, or was that an optional thing? To get your property and casualty. It was an optional, but it was encouraged. It's 90 hours of classroom, and then a comprehensive exam and continuing education. The light bulb went on and I was able to take my homeowners insurance and my auto insurance— ...Maybe

understand what the policy is about. Now I can understand the minutiae of that policy and how it should be sold and what consumers should know about it. Calling my parents and saying, "Let me look over your homeowners insurance. Let me tell you what questions to ask your agent." Applying that knowledge to everyday life for the benefit of— I'm a little OCD.I don't think it's a bad thing. It's attention to detail. I'm a perfectionist. I want to be the best at what I can do. I continually push myself. Come in early, leave late. In between times, read a lot, write a lot. (4)

That's part of my job too. Once I'm done running the slitter or there's no more work to do, there's always something else to do. I'm one like, "Okay, I want to learn that job." I try to learn everything in there to teach another person that comes into the building and wants to learn how to do something. I'm the person they come to and I show them. (5)

Hi. I work for Henry Ford Health System. I'm a cardiac sonographer and what that means is that I take pictures of hearts all day and do stress testing. I got into it because my son needed an echo when he was 10 and was I so fascinated by it. I was a stay at home mom. When my youngest got into middle school, I went to school. I went to a school called Carnegie Institute. I got a certificate. I have worked at Henry Ford for 15 years doing this. It's fascinating every day, every minute. (7)

I don't know. The kids are great, the school's great, the staff is great. The people I work with I have been with, a couple of the girls, for the whole 12 years. We've been there the whole time. It's like family. You know what, I've been doing it for years for free. Cooking and cleaning and (and now I'm getting paid for it. (7)

It can be intense, but it's so rewarding. I take pictures of hearts all day and even if I have all normal hearts in one day they're all different. It's a challenge to see what's going on. You listen to the patient's life story. I talk to them during my test. I listen, I find out what their symptoms are. We look if the heart's causing that. There have been people where I've literally saved their life. They came in because they were short of breath, I took their pictures, I saw that they were in severe heart failure, got them admitted to the hospital. Had they gone home they would've died. Literally, they were told that by the cardiologist. It's so rewarding. It doesn't happen every day but it's so rewarding. It feels good. It feels really good. (7)

Confidence and Humility – When asked if they thought they were 'good at their jobs', with almost unanimous agreement, our participants expressed a great sense of confidence in their abilities. Many were quite humble; it took some probative effort to get them to really explain why they believed they were good at whatever it was that they did. Many seemed to underestimate how dedicated and competent they were. To

them, it just seemed normal or the right thing to do to give 110% to their employers. One African American woman was particularly illustrative of this combination of competence and humility. She is currently the executive secretary of a large organization where she sets business meeting agendas and performs an array of demanding administrative duties. She had little or no formal education but clearly was intelligent and determined. Referred to as 'the principal' by her coworkers, she seemed very strong-willed, organized and determined to make sure she met or exceeded demands placed on her.

I've only ever asked for a raise. I've never asked for a promotion, they've all just came that way. (2)

Take responsibility. I'm also appointed the corporate secretary for the shareholders and the board of directors. It's a male dominated industry, office. A few women. I am very good at what I do because I take charge. I tell them what to do. I manage them. (Laughter) ...Yes. That's my personality. I said I was going to be a lawyer or a secretary at a young age. I'm an extrovert. Part of my personality test is I'm a command. I'm a person that gets it done, gets it done right and I'm on you. I'm the technical advisor for the secretarial, administrative type professionals within the organization. I'm hard on them. We're working professionals, you need to do what you need to do. We're representing the company. Keep that in mind. Are you here for the company or are you here for other reasons? Yes, I'm damn good at what I do. (7)

They keep trying to take my job away, all these people. For instance, today I had a company come in and say to me, "We can do this online, and we can do this, and we can do this, and we can do this." I said, "Then what am I going to do?" They said, "No, we're not taking your job away. We'll just be an assistant to what you're doing." No. I'm more than just what I say I do. I am a liaison for the doctors, too. I have 15 doctors that I work under in a cardiology office. People don't just come in and say, "Here's my hand, prick my finger." It's, "I have an irregular heartbeat, and I can't breathe, and I can't do this." I get the whole nine yards. (8)

I know what I'm doing. There's nobody else in the office that can do what I'm doing. I like my job. I hear about their family members. I hear about everything. I have people that die. I have people that are sick with cancer. I like it. I like my job. It's hard getting there, but I like it. It's hard getting up in the morning and going, but once I'm there, I'm there. ...I don't want to be any place else. I want to be right there. I don't want to go say, "I need to go home," or, "I need to go shopping." I don't do that. I love my job. (8)

I'm an excellent driver. ...I take it very seriously. They're my people, you're my people, everybody's my people. We're one. I just love the bus! They are something else out there, but you have to love it. I love my job, though. You have to love your job. (8)

2. Education & Training

Beyond a listing of education and training in the self-introductions, we delved deeper into the amount, type and importance of education as a factor impacting career success.

- **Formal**

Public and Private Schooling – A fair number – perhaps a third or so of our eighty participants had earned an associate’s degree or completed a certification or other degree program. Just a few of them finished an apprenticeship or skilled trades program while in high school (or directly after graduation). More had pursued and completed skilled trades, certification or other educational career credentials after years on the job. Quite a few had earned some credits at a two or four-year college or university directly after high school. Some had nearly completed an associate’s or bachelor’s program. Many attend employer or government mandated training seminars provided either at the workplace or off site. Although some thought much of their formal education (during or right after high school) had little impact on their current success (typically if they were not in that line of work), others credited formal training and degrees earned with empowering their on the job effectiveness. They did value credentials earned later in life directly tied to their chosen or ‘accidentally’ found job fields. They also believed that additional education including certifications and degrees would empower their chances of future career success.

Some on the job training. Formal certificate classes. Nothing major, other than studying on my own. I took an A+ certification class to learn the skills— Yes, I pretty much went out, ordered a Barnes & Noble book on it, studied it, went and took a test on it to get certification. I did that to achieve my job. I was getting more involved with some of the IT projects there and I was interested in it. My boss at the time said, “If you want that take this class. You’ll learn a lot quickly. It’s a cheap class. You get the certificate.” (2)

I (almost) have a bachelor’s, but I’ve never gone all the way through. I have quite a few, just not anything that’s making any sense. (4)

Currently, I have a degree in business administration, an associate’s, and entrepreneurship because I’m looking to own my own business. I have a degree in both. I’m still in school for paralegal. I’m currently taking paralegal now, and

then after I get my degree in associates's for the paralegal, I'm going to UB for my bachelor's. (4)

Education, two years I went to William Ford Vo-Tech doing auto body repair right out of high school. Figured that was going to be a good deal. A couple of my friends were working at hospitals, thought that medical was going to be the way to go. I also went and got licensed. I'm a professional massage therapist that also has sports therapy and a couple of certifications on it. (5)

What I went to school for was to be an elementary school teacher but you can't get an associate degree for that type so you have to get a full-on, four year degree. I ended up getting a basic associate degree, general studies. Then I went back to get my second associate degree in business because I want to learn to own my own business. (6)

Yes, but the reason I went back to school was I was in these jobs where I was contracting and I wasn't a full time employee and I needed an education to be hired in to be a full time employee and I didn't have that so I was getting passed up. I went back to school so I could put it on my resume. ...The motivation was to get a better job and get hired in as a full time employee, but I am now so I might as well get it. I could not, I could stop and not go. My job specification does not say that I need a degree right now. (7)

I had to take CNA classes, certified nursing assistant classes. Those classes were very important because there are certain things in the field that you learn that you just won't know, like you have to take the wrinkles out of the bed when you make the bed. You can't have any wrinkles in there because those cause bed sores. I wouldn't have learned that unless I was— (8)

I just want to say your sociology and your psychology classes, those types of things help you to understand people better. Also, we passed out some understand the child type of professional developments, where it's a psychologist or something. He's created this entire book about how to understand different behaviors. Conflict resolution and those types of things. What I learned from those things are, we were talking about the children because that's who we work with, but that transcends into all of us. We all have something that stems from childhood or in relationships. (8)

On the Job – Many employers offer and / or demand on-the-job training. In some cases, the mandated training was considered a waste of time. Typically these instances involved state, federal or industry required re-certifications or simple continuing education. Other mandated training is required to teach employees new techniques, technologies or orient them to different machines or ways of doing business. For some, their talents were noticed and their career mobility was rapid. As

they were promoted, they learned how to meet and often exceed the new demands of their positions.

I actually work for the embroidery division doing this gentleman's jacket, right here. I've been there for six years. When I first started I actually was just a low level machine operator. From there the company that I worked with at that time was called Big Bear but they ended up merging with the company I work for now. Through the merge they moved me up to production manager, which I would run the production floor. From there they moved me to customer service, and from customer service now I'm in a sales position. ...I got training along the way, some Lean training, not really too much sales training but just the Lean and production side of things. High school and, like I said, along the way there was certified Lean training and stuff like that, but nothing in the customer service realm. It was all production efficiencies, Six Sigma kind of stuff here and there. (2)

It wasn't layoffs, it was more of the management I was working under was driving everyone bonkers. When I was working at Best Buy, not up here, it was downstate. I don't know about the stores up here. I'm sure they're great. The management team we had, they kept changing, corporate would say, I was a supervisor of the computer department. They're like, "Focus on this this week." "Great." "Hey guys, we're going to focus on selling whatever, or selling protection plans on the computers. Make sure we're pushing this, explain, blah blah blah." Next week, "We're focusing on this, now." It's like, "We just started making progress. Why are we doing that?" You'd get yelled at, "You didn't make progress here." "You didn't give us time to develop." The management seemed very bipolar and it was a lot of stress and I was—... I was frustrated. I was like, "You know what, I need a decent job." I started looking around. I had a friend who was working at Geico in Long Island. He's like, "Interview, see where it goes." I went in there, and this was 13 years ago so you actually had to go into the place, sit down, fill out the application there and wait. Someone finally saw you. I was there probably for four hours that first day, had an interview with someone and they asked me to come back the following week, had another round of interviews. They asked me to come back the following week, I had a final set of interviews, sat down with someone listened to them do the job, met with the manager who said, "Do you think you can do this job?" They did a sell me a pen routine. They said, "Nurse's office is over there. Go get drug screened and everything like that and we'll see you in three weeks when training starts." I knew I was in a bad scenario. (2)

In order to do my job, there's three to six months of intensive training. ...Yes. Then it's followed up with continual training that goes along. I was actually trained yesterday. We had a training course yesterday morning, and I took an elective-type training course the day before. (4)

I got the training. They trained me. They took the time to train me and they did a good job training me, giving me the necessary skills that I needed. (7)

In various instances, training was not mandatory. Employers often make available opportunities for employees to learn new skills. Savvy employees knew they should voluntarily complete these training sessions if they want their supervisors to consider them for future advancement. Many participants enjoy learning new skills and tackling new methods. Changes keep their jobs interesting and allow them to better serve both their clients and superiors. In some rapidly changing industries, for example information technology and healthcare, employees know they must continually retrain to help their employers (and themselves) remain competitive.

I'm an insurance compliance officer, so I understand how insurance companies are pretty boring. I've been with M&T Bank. I work for the investment arm of the bank. ... I work for the investment arm of the bank, which is the broker dealer. When you buy investments from a financial consultant, we manage or we oversee those activities. How long have you been there, Lori? Twelve years. Prior to that, it was with Citibank. I started at the retail bank in 1994 as a pool teller and worked myself all the way up through management, through new accounts, through the investment arm. I got securities licensed in 2000, so I have— Series Seven, 24. That was self-taught on the job. The bank paid for that. I have continuing education as a result of that and insurance licensed. (4)

- **Informal**

At Home / Personal Time – At least a few of our more impressive participants discussed their commitment to self-improvement and continual education noting they went far beyond minimal requirements set forth by their employers. One or two mentioned reading inspirational books (e.g. Think and Grow Rich), “Googling” or “YouTubing” topics of personal and professional interest, attending conferences (not employer required or paid for) and spending other time, energy, and effort to meet their thirst for knowledge and insight.

C&C Machining. I've done it 30 years. I taught myself computerized drafting. It's called CAD/CAM. I taught myself that on weekends, probably 25 or 30 years ago. ... The owner bought the software and I would go in on weekends and teach myself. Then after he saw I was getting good at it, he was giving me half pay. I ended up being the programmer for the shop. I do all of the CAD/CAM programmings. (1)

Just by trial and error, and asking questions. Finally, after they started warming up, they started warming up to me and they know that— They'll come in and they say, "I need this." I'm like, "Hold on. I'll get you what you need, but you need to explain to me what it is and department it's for, so I know that if it's not already here and if it's something that we might need, I should maybe keep in stock with the rest of the stuff that we have." Eventually, and up until that point, before they would even do that, I would just have to listen really well, pick out those keywords, have my pen and paper with me all the time write it down, then go to the computer and literally Google it, and find out what it is. Do a little bit of research about it and read electrical manuals just to see. (4)

It's really just a lot of speed building. I'll listen to dictation tapes and work on different brief forms they're called.You have to really be dedicated, set aside time. There's also a lot of multiple choice. Just general knowledge about the court system. (4)

I have regulatory oversight, so I have to look at new regulations, but I'm not a lawyer. I'm constantly Googling laws to see, okay here's what the law says. Here's the statute. How does it apply to what our business does? We have legal counsel that we can enlist their help, but they want specific questions, so in order to ask smart questions, I have to educate myself. (4)

Doing my own research as far as, let's say something really simple. Let's say our company is running, just started running Windows 10 installed on all computers. I will be at home researching everything about Windows 10. The operating speed, as far as brand, the speed of the brand and all that—(5)

He didn't allow you to feel, "I can't do it. I'm not smart enough for it." He pushed me. I remember I kept saying, "This is too hard. I don't want to do it." The more he challenged me the more I went home and I would write down things and try to figure it out myself. I would write down different words. Look the words up. Make sure I knew when he says the oral codes from the ear, different words. I wanted to know. It was me wanting to make sure my job was done well. (6)

I Google a lot. That's how I was able to fill out the application, and fundraising techniques, and networking techniques, because you have to have that network. I didn't have any business classes. Literally, I came into this wanting to help and with a passion to help people because I had seen what was lacking in terms of lupus warriors in the area. (8)

At Work– Quite a bit of training / education occurs informally in the work place. Ambitious, curious employees learn from watching their peers and supervisors competently complete their own work responsibilities. In many instances, supervisors and managers see and appreciate this interest and reach out to share what they know with their subordinates. Good mentors also were credited with

giving praise and prompting diligent subordinates to seek out higher level, more challenging positions.

I haven't had much training for the current position that I'm in, but I've had ongoing training throughout the 10 years of employment that I've had. The ongoing, on the job training. I work with HIPAA, so we have to keep up with regulations and yadda yadda. They've sent me offsite for Microsoft Excel classes or little things like that. Are you happy about that or not? Yes. I think anytime you learn something new it's a good thing. (2)

I think I learned from my coworkers. We all did the same thing, we all were in it together. Everybody covered for each other. Everybody helped each other. I worked at three different hospitals locally, and everybody was in the same boat. You learned from your coworkers and that's what kept you going. (3)

You have to learn it. You need to spit it back out, but that really doesn't have a whole lot to do with when somebody's calling you every name in the book and they're telling you that you're at dead end of this street and you want a cop there now, and you don't know what street they're talking about. That book is not helping you learn your mapping, learn the city, figure out the phone system, how to hone in on where the person is as far as if they're on a cell phone. By the way, we don't know where you are. We're not on TV, you need to tell us. That all needs to be done while taking calls. It needs to be embedded in the person and how to do all of these things at once, on-the-job training. That's a different role. (4)

Other than on the job training, have you had any other formal or informal education? No. It all pretty much came from there except for the classes that they offered. It started out, there weren't that many employees and the system was smaller.

C) Opinion-Leaders and Gatekeepers: Individuals Who Were Instrumental in Career Choices, Success and Satisfaction

Toward the end of the focus group sessions we asked our participants to identify who and how different individuals had impacted their career paths.

- **Self**

Many of our successful employees have found their way to where they are with minimal assistance from others. They figured things out on their own. They made mistakes, but also identified and pursued opportunities. They are ambitious and often seek out opportunities to move to a more desirable job. When faced with obstacles, they are strategic in finding solutions. For example, one especially impressive young man shared he had a supervisor with whom he did not get along. He prepared his “elevator pitch” and watched for an opportunity to meet with his supervisor’s superior. When the opportunity presented itself, he seized it and convinced the upper level manager to promote him to a more desirable position working under a better supervisor.

Dedication to work It was from me directly, but as I got older I realized that I wanted to impact people that don't have families or someone that will look out for them or help them. You have to treat the patients like you want somebody to treat you or your family member. Recently my mother has been sick, so I'm a big advocate for her, to the point where we had to have a meeting. One of the advocates at the hospital was like, "If I was sick I wish you would advocate for me, or some of the other patients here." (Laughter.) People don't have that. Just looking at my parents— (3)

I had to, getting back to what you were asking earlier. I had a manager who was all through college. He earned the position. I started at Fleet Bank and I got into their— I came from a collection agency where everything was now, now, now, now, now. You hang up with one person, you call another one. You don't waste any time. You don't talk to the person next to you, just stay focused and you'll make a lot of money. I had that mentality. When I started at Fleet I was doing in a week what their top person was doing in a month as far as calls and as far as bringing in money. I had this one manager though that didn't like me. I had earrings in both ears. Young kid, I was a teenager, just into my 20s. He didn't like me and he kept me at the lowest he could. It seemed like every time I was eligible to move up he would find something wrong and write me up for it so I'd have to wait another year or I'd have to wait another six months. It went on and on and on and on, but I knew

that his boss liked me because she made it a point to stop by me all the time, say hi to me, always told me how great I was doing. I planned it one day to where I was in the same spot as her to have a conversation with her to mention something and that got me out from under him into another department and all of a sudden got me moving. (3)

It was after high school where I wanted to pursue medicine in general but we didn't have the money for college, so I decided to volunteer at a hospital. When I volunteered in X-ray I got a calling, an epiphany, I should do this. Taking pictures of human body and looking inside of them and seeing what it looks like, it interested me. I could have chosen MRI or internal medicine but X-ray seemed appropriate for me. (6)

Honestly, no one ever told me that it wasn't going to work. That comes from me being a child. I'm an only child and I'm an Aries, which is a terrible combination because I'm going to do everything that I say I'm going to, sick or not sick. Every goal that I've set out to accomplish, it's been done. I'm very resourceful and spunky. I'm going to figure it out. Just like we created the nonprofit, at the time, everything wasn't online. I had to do a 53-page IRS application five years ago. Everything is now digitized. I remember meeting with attorneys, and they said, "We'll do it for \$4,000." "No, I'm going to sit with my dad and we'll do it for free." It took me three months to do it, and I was very proud of myself because the IRS only called me once to ask for the application. .. I was extremely proud of myself. Just little faith increasers. If I can do this, I can do anything. (8)

- **Family & Friends**

Not surprisingly, family members – most commonly a parent or grandparent – have strong (usually positive) influences on career choices. More than a few mentioned lessons learned from elders. The most typical ‘lesson’ was to work hard, always be prepared to take care of yourself and to some extent, to ‘make things happen’. Some spouses were also very supportive in this way. One woman told of the great effort her husband spent submitting applications for his wife. Another shared that her husband fully supports her decision to quit her high-paying job to pursue a degree in the health field, even though she would forgo earning an income for at least a few years.

*I just turned 17. There were openings and he said, "My grandma is an old, tough Italian. Get our Goddamn a** over here. You'll have a paycheck every two weeks for the rest of your life." He was right. Thirty something years later, I'm still trucking so he was right. (1)*

I was just out of high school. My grandfather got me in there. (1)

(My father is) from the South. It's a certain kind of bringing up in the South back then. He always said, "You've got to work hard. You've got to get your own. You've got to have it for yourself. You don't depend on anybody to do anything for you." That's the way it is. You can't count on somebody to feed you or to clothe you or to help you when you're down. You always have to get it for yourself. My father always taught that to me and all my sisters. (3)

Outside of my parents, he (my husband) has been definitely my number one supporter because of the fact that I work part-time at the college. I'm not full-time. He is picking up the slack. My income from myself has changed a lot, so for me to still continue on the school because I told him, "Paralegal. After my bachelor's, I'm done." "You keep going." He's allowing me to fight. I just had a child like three years ago that was a shocker. It was a blessing, but a shocker. I was at my down point because I'm like, "Oh my God." I found out I'm pregnant. My oldest is like 24 and I'm like, "You've got to be kidding me." At that point, I started to feel down because I'm like, "What about me? I want to do me this time." At that point, I thought I wasn't going to be able to continue on, and he encouraged me. "Finish going to school. This is what you want to do." He supported me and he's supporting the family. (4)

My dad. He pushed me to do something other than just work at a store. Not that that's a bad thing. I enjoyed fashion and things like that, but he just pushed me, pushed me, pushed me until... He pushed my sister. (8)

In a few instances, our participants had taken over their family's business or had 'followed in the footsteps' of a parent or sibling. One woman became aware of court reporting through her mother who was in the field. A gentleman from Buffalo told us he's the fourth person in his family to be a corrections officer. A man in Southfield shared he probably can't get hired by Ford because so many of his family members work for them.

I'm Richard. I'm part of a family-based union expo contracting company. I'm the vice president, chief of operations. Yes, sometimes. ...I had to get used to not having a tool belt, reluctantly. I've been back in Buffalo since 1990. My dad started the business in '84 when I first got out of the military, but it wasn't busy enough to keep me gainfully employed in Buffalo. Before I came back to Buffalo I worked at the State Department in Washington. (1)

Out of my family, I'm the fourth one that's been doing the job. (corrections officer) (1)

My mom was a secretary and I thought it was, at that time, glamorous (laughs). I liked to type. I was good at it. I was very fast. She got dressed up every day, went to work. It was something I was like, "I could do that. I'm 15, it'd be easy

enough to do.” Through that, I did that for probably four years with the same company.After that experience the attorney that had helped me needed an office assistant, was how he presented it to me. I was like, “I need a job. I do office work.” I got in there and I was like, “Wow, I really like this. It’s more than just office work. It’s actually helping people.” It requires, what I felt, it was a lot more knowledge. I took that and actually changed my career path, because I was taking business courses to get a degree in business, generally, and got the paralegal degree. (2)

I took up restoring the house we were living in that was over 100 years old. My neighbor, he saw me out there working on that house for months and months and months. “We really need somebody like you at work.” He was a supervisor at the time. He’s the reason I started there. He went off on his own, he’s got his own little business going now. (7)

- **Employers & Co-workers**

Employers (managers, supervisors, business owners) and co-workers influenced our participants in several ways. Some supervisors saw potential in their subordinate and encouraged that person to understand and pursue their strengths. They also shared their knowledge of career paths and potential positions worth targeting. This helped to boost self-esteem and empower the employee’s belief that he or she could succeed in a higher-level position. We had several employees who had progressed from very low, entry level positions to positions of high authority. One woman (who was among the oldest in our groups) holds a high-level management role as a compliance officer for a major investment firm. She started at an entry level position in her field and, over many years, passed a variety of exams including series 7 and other demanding insurance and investment tests, requiring effort, commitment and intelligence. She shared that she has never forgotten her roots and greets whomever she meets in a kind and friendly manner.

As noted previously, some participants mentioned coworker animosity toward their ambition and effort. These situations have not held them back, but have created some on-the-job stress – particularly if their hard work is perceived to make their coworkers look bad. A few younger participants noted it can be difficult to supervise older, often more experienced employees, who may resent working for someone with less

experience. Some of our older participants complained that younger managers – often with a college degree but little on-the-job experience – can be frustrating as they don't fully respect the capabilities and institutional knowledge of more experienced workers.

Gender also played a role in job satisfaction. Part of the rationale for the work plan involving two focus groups exclusive to women was to explore possible differences in career pathways and factors impacting success that may be tied to gender. In Buffalo, we heard few stories from a few women where men had held them back or otherwise negatively impacted their careers. Conversely, they (somewhat humorously) noted it was other women coworkers who were more likely to prove difficult in the workplace. The other women resented the extra work effort of our participants or disliked having to report to a female supervisor, particularly if the supervisor was a one-time peer. In Detroit however, a few women shared personal experiences where they suffered from some sexism from men in the workplace. Many, particularly in the skilled trades and some other male-dominated industries, work side by side with men who sometimes harass them. However, none of our participants seemed incapable of dealing with this harassment and none told us they quit a job or filed a formal complaint tied to gender discrimination or harassment.

But because of that and because women like this room, they all just had nothing good to say because they did not believe I deserved to get the job. ... You have all kinds of different influences and anger can be one of them. Women were the negative ones? It was the women. It was the women that looked just like me.Right. They'd been there so long, some of whom went back, and they didn't see me go back. "Shaneda, you should go back." They were trying to discourage me and what I'm doing because I'm doing well for myself. They want me to go— No, I'm not going. It's women.... Yes, it's women. They don't like to see you get ahead or better yourself at all. (4)

It is true about women being negative because on my team in the position that I have, I'm the senior rep, so I'm basically, besides the manager and the supervisors, I'm the next over everyone else. If they have an issue, basically they have to come to me before anybody else. I'm the one that helps them out, so sometimes they really don't want to come to you to ask you a question because they feel that you're going to go back and saying something, which I don't. ...Yes, because it's women and they don't want to come to you and ask you anything, but they'd be first ones to say mean things about you behind your back. It's constant, but they don't think

it's going to get back to you. But it does. Like you said, I just let it roll off my back because I do what I have to do. I'm not at the job to make any friends. I'm at the job to do what I need to do to help my clients, to make sure that their kids get health insurance. That's what's important to me. (4)

My day job in my 9:00 to 5:00, she makes sure to let me know. She's thankful I'm there, she's so happy I can assist her. I used to assist the VP before she retired in last December. She was grateful that I was there and I was grateful that she was like a mentor to me. She'd take me out of the dispatch room and put me somewhere else, where she believed that I would thrive. (8)

Was your job better or worse because you had a lot of women around you? Or a lot of men? Yes, at the city. It's something terrible. The women are something terrible. See the women gives you (grief). The men will accept you with open arms. The women coming in and you think they'll take their job or something. They sure are, but they're something.... Yes. Some of the women, because we're so close knit that people can get bitchy. (8)

- **Educators**

Just a few identified educators (teachers or guidance counselors) as having had a major impact on career decisions and pathways. Some had experienced great success in classes which helped them to realize their potential, but it was more a self-realization than meaningful instruction or motivation from an educator. One young woman (the previously-mentioned court reporter from Buffalo), told us she was one of only two students (out of thirty-five) to complete rigorous academic program. This success gave her the confidence to pursue a position in her preferred field.

When I was 18 years old, I was in my electronics training school. We rotated instructors every two months. It was 18 months course, I had nine good instructors. My seventh course instructor, he'd always say to the class and me because I stayed late because I was the slowest guy in the class, he just always encouraged me, he said, "Steve, you are going to get it right and it's going to evolve well for you, just keep your nose to the stone." He just kept telling me that every day I was the last kid to leave class. (5)

At Detroit Catholic Central High. I asked him (guidance counselor) what should I do, what would I need to experience or what would I need to do hands-on to learn more about what I am interested in. He said, "Why don't you volunteer at a hospital?" At the time I blew him off, but then— (6)

D) FUTURE EXPECTATIONS

- **Worrisome**

There were only a few participants who were pessimistic about their career security, even though some see how technology and other market forces are rapidly impacting their industry. Others shared mergers and acquisitions were realistic possibilities that may force them to relocate or lose their jobs. One younger man in the financial services industry said his employer had been sold to another buyer resulting in massive layoffs, but he had been spared, this time. That said, he was confident he could obtain another job in the field if necessary, but also wanted to pursue a long-time passion of obtaining a job in the skilled trades.

Before I was working at that plant, I was feeling like you were feeling. "I'm not worried about this. We're a billion dollar company. I'm not worried about it." We got bought out by a smaller company and then changes started happening. We got bought out three times. I survived two times and the third one, they caught me. In the healthcare industry, that's big business. All they're doing is buying companies out. I can't really be too optimistic from that standpoint. (1)

Just that they might downsize. Right now they're constantly growing and they're constantly hiring new people. My current job I would never get let go because we're paid for by my company, not vendors and stuff, but you never know how that is. Technology's changing every day, every week. (2)

No, I'm worried. I don't know if mine's staying. I know they're there now, but I don't know how long they're staying. I lost my job in '08 during the huge market crumble. I was one of the cuts from Bank of America so I sat there and tried to change gears. I went—... What do you mean by that? What, specifically, did you do to change gears? I tried to get into skilled trades. I went to the steamfitters. I went to the tin knockers. I went to the electricians. I went to every single union. I took test after test. I studied and did everything, but I didn't have the skill. ...While I scored good on the tests and the mechanic part, but having the actually on-the-job training, I didn't have it. There were people that were in line and waiting right along with me. (3)

Chrysler has announced they're going to move the truck to a different plant. That plant has closed down recently with the 200 and the Fusion being subbed out. Not the Fusion, Dart. When they move the truck they've got to mix those two sets of groups of people. I've only got four years seniority. That's nerve-racking. What are you going to do about it? I took three part-time jobs. I work at Comerica Park as an usher. I work there as a tour guide at the stadium. I took a job with a company called Safe Management which does security for Ford Field, Michigan Stadium, The Palace, and DTE. I work all of those events backstage, all that stuff. ...I'm trying to get in and make a name for myself.

Hard worker, dependable. Hopefully, if something starts to happen within Chrysler, go to the people that have seen me work, management and all that, and tell them, see if they can help me out again. (5)

It's slowly changing, but all of the new theaters they're building right now, they don't have projectionists. There are very few. Actually AMC, I don't know if you're familiar with AMC, they don't have projectionists. Everything is moving to this new computer system where you can do everything remotely. Thank goodness we're not doing that, at least not yet. Five or 10 years from now, I want to probably slowly get away from the theater. (6)

- **Optimistic**

To a much higher degree, our participants were optimistic about their future job prospects. For some nearing the end of full-time employment, they believe they need to just “hang on” or “put in the time” (in months or a few years) to qualify for full retirement. That said, with very few exceptions, they did not intend to entirely discontinue working. At least a few hoped to work part-time in a field quite different from their current one.

Some of the younger skilled workers were especially optimistic. Many were confident their career field would grow – particularly those in information technology and healthcare. Others in the skilled trades areas also were very positive about their future. They see many older coworkers nearing retirement and remain confident that their skills and talents will continue to fulfill a need.

I did well at the interview, I proved myself. A lot of people my age aren't interested in blue collar stuff, they're not making (much money). Why? Technology, laziness, entitled. Low intelligence from evolution. A lot of these kids these days don't want to do blue collar stuff. These baby boomers are going to be 60, 65, 70. I capitalize. I'm a young guy and a lot more (crafty) than most people my age. Big trouble is skilled labor. I capitalize on people leaving, guys retiring. I'm the next in line. Kids want to get these jobs making \$100,000 a year off the bat. I'm 26. I didn't make \$100,000 last year but I bought a house, though. Most of my friends still live with mommy and daddy. I know I'm going to be safe. I'm not going to get laid off. (1)

I'm optimistic. I always stay optimistic with everything. That's my nature. I really don't see myself optimistic in this company because it's a small business. It's not very large. My goals will exceed the company's ability to provide for me. (2)

We're (Ecolab) a Fortune 500 company. The market is growing. In other countries, there are lots of systems set up like in the United States as far as health that ensure safety at restaurants and stuff like that. Yes, I was offered a job in Texas for food safety solutions. It's a company that we've got a very good culture. As long as you're a hard worker, you're honest, and you're not afraid to do what's right then you have a position in that company. (5)

I've heard that (our industry will need fewer people due to automation) since 1991 ...It's got some good software prediction tools, but they always have to run the dynamic event to prove it. That's just the way it is. It will dwindle off by 50 percent with all of their predictions. The software programs that are out there help them, the engineers and designers, to get closer to the real answer. Can you continue to be doing what you're doing? I'm 100 percent sure I'll be doing what I'm doing because I know back in the day when I was the young man, there were older men and women teaching me. Now I'm in that role teaching other people. ...I do. I do, and it's because it gives me a sense of satisfaction that everybody else helped me so much, it's my turn to pay back and help them. It's a rewarding feeling to know I was helped so now I'd be a fool not to help someone else. (5)

I was initially hired for the State of Michigan but the City of Detroit. They became privatized, had to fire a lot of people. I got fired, but they rehired me into the new company last minute. It goes by grant funding and state funding, all types of funding. If they lose it, then— (I) Apply at the hospital. They have a need for it and they have job openings all the time for breastfeeding educators. No, I'm not worried. (6)

Surprisingly, several participants were excited about their futures because they intend to start their own businesses. Some will do so once they have earned full retirement benefits from their current employer. Several others are saving funds now or studying and planning to create a business or build upon a part-time venture in which they're currently involved.

The goal was always to use the salary that I'm currently getting paid to fund my own business. That's what I hope, in 10 years, I hope that that's flowing. I hope to always at least be a part of the company that I'm currently at, but rather than continuing to move up and be a large role in the team, I would rather go the opposite way and take a smaller salary but still be a part of that—One thing that I've always wanted to do is be a business owner because it's your ideas. It's something that you create. Through my entire career it's always been somebody else's idea on how the company should be run. This is the mission statement that we have to follow. This is our goals for the year. Rather than listening to somebody else tell me I'll do it my own. (2)

E) LESSONS LEARNED and ADVICE to SHARE

To conclude the focus group discussion sessions, we asked each participant to reflect upon their lives and share any career related wisdom learned over their lives. The responses varied greatly: some had regrets, some had none, others had learned lessons they wished had come earlier in life.

- **Make Better Choices**

More than a few shared they wished they had taken high school and career choices more seriously at a younger age. Some had ‘partied’ too much, others were heavily into sports, dating or not focused on much at all. Others thought they lost one or more years chasing a career field that wasn’t right for them or they had spent time and money taking classes which have yielded little or no benefit. It seemed many adults simply didn’t appreciate the reality of what was required of them, in either the demands of college or in pursuit of their career.

Not to probably have changed my major four times (laughter). I have so many student loans. I would love to go back to school but I already have so many loans that I’m going to pay off now. It’s scary to then take on more loans. I just turned 30 and it’s terrifying. I should have done it, probably 10 years ago. I should have done it right after school, but I waited. (2)

The big thing that comes to mind, especially with some of the men I’ve worked with at Chrysler now on the lines is sharing with them about how the immoral part of my life that happened just wasn’t worth it. I try to let them know about losing your family and stuff like that was not worth it. ...The grass was not greener on the other side. The things that I lost were so incredible, but at the time you don’t even see it because you’re so thrilled with whatever is happening. I compare myself to the person on an intervention show that loses their whole life because of drugs or alcohol, but mine was a woman. It destroyed my life. (5)

I wish I would have done it a lot sooner and a lot quicker.... I wish I would have followed through with it. When I got out of high school, I feel like I messed around a little bit and just didn’t do what I was supposed to do. I was going to school and I had three kids. It’s not I’m not going to school and it’s hard to go back. (6)

wish I would’ve done two things. Number one, I wish I would have gotten my degrees earlier in life. I played around, had a lot of fun in life, still worked. I

worked part time, always had a full time job. I had many, many part time jobs working full time, but I wish I would've gotten my degrees earlier in life in my early 20s. From that point on I would've been sent in more of a better direction. (7)

Less partying more work. I do. I know that I have time. It's just you're out there partying every day. I feel all that too. I get it. Just take some classes. Party as you're going to school, but just do it early. It just gets harder. Then you're going to waste all this time partying it up. (8)

- **Consider the Trades**

Both some men and women from both blue and pink collar professions thought more younger people should seriously consider pursuing jobs in the trades. They knew that many college educated adults have weak job prospects and also knew there were great opportunities for high paid jobs with good benefits in the trades. Many blamed schools and society for disparaging working with your hands or accepting jobs that might require schooling but not a bachelor's degree or greater.

Consider a training besides going to college and putting yourself in debt. The average person in America owes \$35,000 of debt from college. I'm not in that much debt. I pay cash almost every semester because I work three, four jobs. (1)

I like the skilled trades. I've been in it for a long time. The kid that go to school well, they can take off that way. The other ones, you're better off. If you've got the skill set in your hands, use them. There's plenty of work out there. (1)

Everybody's not a college person. Look at the trades. The trades are dying ... they need people. That's why electricians get what they get. Plumbers get what they get because the kids don't want to do that. They always see that, "If I can do this and go, whoa, look at that." That's a handful out of the big pot. (3)

- **Stay in the military**

As noted above, we had a fair number of participants with military backgrounds. At least a few regretted having completed only a four or six year stint. In retrospect, they knew if they had stayed in the military they would be close to retirement with guaranteed earnings and benefits. They suggested the armed forces should be more seriously considered by many young adults.

(MILITARY EXPERIENCE) gives you discipline. It turns you into an adult. You're going to get some education. You could make a heck of a living and come out with a decent pension after 30 years. I never went in the service because I didn't have to at the time. We had to still sign up. Looking back, I know a lot of guys that are retired with 30 years. They're pulling a lot of money doing absolutely nothing now. I didn't look at it back then. I just wanted to get a job and go to work. In hindsight, if anything I would've changed, I would have gone in the service. (3)

That's what I tell my children, you can go to college or the Army. (Laughter) I'm serious, the Army you go through basic training and live on base and you learn to be self-sufficient. Even though you don't have to do it your whole life, but you will become respectful and you get the basics that you need in life. You just have to realize you have to do what you love, or you just have to do something to make you a more productive citizen for this country. It's hard out there. I just want them to have the tools. I would tell them to do something and you have to do it. I feel like you should do what you have a passion for. I made some decisions in my life, that I just did to make others happy. (6)

- **Find and Pursue Your Passion**

Though a bit more complex to describe, a pervasive recommendation was for young adults to find something they truly loved, to pursue it with all of their energy and to 'make things happen'. They truly believed you needed – and could – create your own opportunities in life. They also shared that too many adults are not realistic in their expectations and are not grateful for what they have; they should appreciate not just their job but all the gifts within their lives.

You've got to grow up being interested in something. Find an interest. What I was taught from my parents, in school, they don't really train you to think about going into business for yourself. You go to school, become employees, not employers. If you also keep in mind that there's a possibility you can be an employer, what do you do to get there? You've got to plan steps to get here. It's like a business plan; if you can make it work on paper, then it has a chance of working. If you pipe dream and don't be (77:42 inaudible/crosstalk) nothing, time is going to fly by and you haven't accomplished anything. Then you're 37 wondering, "What have I done with my time?" (1)

You create your own opportunities. Don't wait for something to come to you. Go get it. (2)

Advice – be confident and take risks: I didn't know it existed then. I didn't even have a vision or a thought in my mind what I wanted to do. I encourage them that if you find yourself in that same boat don't worry about it. Pick something. Work hard. Go for it and don't be afraid to try. Don't be afraid because

everybody else is in the same boat. No other man or woman around you has all the answers, just like you don't have the answers, so don't let that hold you back. Go forward. That's my advice. (5)

If I wanted to tell other people any advice, it would be that if you want to pursue something, go for it 100 percent. Don't hold back because of something. Just keep pushing yourself. (6)

Be realistic. Be really realistic. Be grateful with what you have. (8)

- **Be Versatile & Open-minded**

Our current world demands most employees be flexible and have the ability to adapt to change job requirements. Advice given from many was for younger adults to be broaden their skill set and be prepared for change. They also believed a great source of inspiration and insight was to listen and learn from others, particularly those with more age, experience and wisdom.

*I tell people, "Don't just be a welder, learn mechanics. Learn electrical. Build. Don't have all your eggs in one basket. You've got to be well rounded." When I was in the Coast Guard, I was so excited. I was jumping on airplanes. After a while, it got to be a job. I said, "Why am I out here? This a***** should be out here now. I'm out here risking my neck to save this jerk?" Be well rounded. Don't put all your eggs in one basket. (1)*

I don't blame it on my parents, but we moved 30-sometimes in my lifetime. I'm super adaptable, but I think too adaptable. I can change jobs. I can change schools. I can move. It's no big deal. My husband was in the same house his whole life, went to one college, has the same job. I'm a complete anomaly to him. For me, I don't know how to really change that. (2)

Not particularly because I wound up getting jobs that were pretty similar to what I was doing. After you start the job they offer you a chance to do something else. They say, "Can you do this?" "I'll take a look at it," and wound up looking at it and it's like, "This isn't too tough." You wind up adding and it's like, "Never turn down the chance to do something else. You're either going to find out you can do it or you're going to find out you can't." (3)

Mitch, you know what, not to interrupt, but I listen to everybody, and everybody around that I notice it a people person. I've listened to everybody in here and I've picked up something from everybody here. Not that I'm ever going to use it, weeks, months from now, but you know what, I've learned from listening to peoples' life stories. Especially Kareem here. Him being in the military and stuff

like that, I love that kind of stuff and I like those stories, but god, you've got to listen to people! (7)

The best advice my grandfather gave me when I was younger is to learn as much as you can from wherever you are. What you're doing, it doesn't matter, you can learn something. My son hated his job. He was working at a restaurant and he's like, "I hate going in there." I said, "You know what, instead of hating it why don't you go in there and try to learn something? Why don't you pay attention? This is a very good restaurant, they've been around," and he did. He wound up, "Oh my god! I'm learning I can butcher now, I can do this." It changed his whole perspective on going into work from hating to loving it. (7)

Learn to fit in In work, I feel like I'm in a good place. I got some advice when I was 19 and started in this industry and it resonates maybe through all women. It was you don't have to listen to everybody's conversations at work, but be aware of what's going on around you. That's how I learned a lot of things. I learned about the electrical field and I learned about what's going on in the field. I learned that if you could speak the speak, meaning what the guys were talking about. If you could speak the speak, then you can fit in and know what's going on. (8)

- **Manage Your Finances and Credit**

Although not anticipated, some shared they wished they had managed their personal credit and finances better. They admonished adults entering the workforce to minimize debt, to watch their credit ratings, to begin saving for retirement at an early age.

Credit scores, not making miscellaneous bills, getting bills paid. I'd tell myself to stay in school. Figure out your life. Right now, I'm 35 and I still don't feel like I found my niche. (1)

Advice manage finances better Yes. That's what pushed me growing up all my childhood. I knew I didn't want to be on the corner. Once you know what you don't want to do, everything else will fall into place. Take care of your credit and your health because somebody could strip you of everything you've got. Your credit and your health, that's you at the end of the day. You can lose everything. (5)

- **Value of Earning a Bachelor's Degree (or greater)**

A small group – but not a majority – regretted not completing a bachelor's degree and would advise others to do whatever was needed to complete at least four years of

college. Some planned to do so in the future. (A few were currently pursuing a four degree.) The perceived value of a bachelor's degree stems from the knowledge that many positions simply require the degree to simply apply. There was some belief that a bachelor's degree (or masters) would open up job opportunities and offer higher incomes and more security. However, nearly everyone believed they were fully qualified and could meet the demands of jobs requiring the degree.

One question you asked I wanted to build on. You said, "Why would you get a bachelor's degree?" In my time of applying for jobs a lot of times if you, there's online applications, and you can apply and apply and even if you've got the skills, the years experience, if you don't actually have that bachelor's degree— I spent, probably an hour on Perry's website filling out my application, doing the whole thing, and I got to the end, "Do you have a bachelor's degree?" "No, but I've got more than what you're asking for everything else." It was like, "Thank you, no thank you." (2)

Because I didn't have a bachelor's degree I didn't take exams that I wasn't qualified for. There are many exams with New York state, it doesn't matter how long you've been there. If you don't have a bachelor's degree you can't apply. If I did, I probably would be grade 23 by now or something. Do you think you're qualified for the jobs anyway? Totally qualified. (Laughter.) Truly I could do those jobs. It's that credential. (3)

Yes, it is. You've got to make sure you hit those numbers. I don't know, we have gone through a lot of bosses. They're constantly getting moved up because they have the schooling. Do you think the schooling makes a difference? Yes, absolutely. Tell me why. Could you be a manager? Sure, but I don't have the schooling. You have to have it in order to move up. (6)

No, that's exactly what I mean. From the beginning, dropping out of Michigan State because of how I was treated there, that's not an excuse to drop out and I learned that on the next step of my life in the Marine Corps. Just because it was bad doesn't mean it's terrible.....I would've gotten a bachelor's in poly sci. I would've gone into the Marine Corps as an officer instead of as an enlisted man and then I would've gone into politics. That was my dream as a child, to go into politics and maybe write speeches for bigger politicians, but eventually go far— (7)

I should have done (earned a degree) it a long time ago, and I need it. I feel like once I have it, then I can advance to much more... The small raises aren't getting me very far. I can make more when I have a degree. (8)

What's this bachelor's going to get you? I would like to work, maybe, for a different company doing non-transportation stuff. Regardless, I just would like more money,

so wherever that's going to be that's what I'd like. Yes, mainly because I can make three times more than what I'm making right now on my own— (8)

You know how you go to different doctors, and different things like that, and they have their degrees on the wall. It just looks better. It's an education. I might have caught some training or something, in there that I needed to know. Just like with the CNA. Certain things that I need to know as far as running my own business and just schooling. (8)

My regret is not finishing college. How would it have made a difference?.....More money, for sure. (8)

F) CONCLUDING COMMENTS

- **Defining Success**

First, it's worth exploring what it really means to be 'successful'. There was no doubt that some of our participants earn six-figure incomes and hold positions of high authority, despite never having obtained a four-year college degree. A few of our youngest participants were notably successful, possessing management level or high-skilled jobs and an almost unlimited potential to earn more and move up in their current field or another.

However, many of our employees – particularly those over forty – earn a decent income (\$40,000+) but have not moved into higher positions. They've simply stayed with one employer or in a single field for enough years to earn a middle income, and many of these adults have little upward mobility potential or motivation. Whether a school cook, a corrections officer or a nurse, they're not likely to advance much and are likely to have only modest income improvements.

- **Preparing for the Next Job: Skills Portability, Continual Training & Networking**

As mentioned, not many of our participants had followed a straight and narrow path from high school to their current job positions. Just a few had a focused vision at a young age and had completed an apprenticeship program or associates degree which

has lead to their current career success. Most made their success happen. They (often randomly) found an employer or job field they liked and then worked hard to gain the skills and education necessary to excel.

To help bolster job security and promotional opportunities with their current employer or prepare for a potential opportunity with a different employer, many possess a strong desire to continually learn and build their arsenal of skills. In some instances, this involves formal on-the-job or professional training. In other cases, simply observing others and building skills on personal time (reading self-help books, manuals, etc.), helps fulfill an innate desire to know more and be better prepared for whatever the future brings.

I wouldn't say no because they'll probably never ask me again. It doesn't come up a lot because the town supervisor is cheap and he doesn't particularly like us. He'd like to see us go away or turn into a DPW. I'm going to capitalize on that and build my resume and skills more. I never say no to training especially if it's free training or pays me to train. If you say no, you're an idiot and you don't deserve it. You want to pay me, then yes. (1)

Ever since I was young I always liked technology. When I was younger I took my Nintendo apart and put it back together. It still worked. I was in college, I took a bunch of different computer classes. Unfortunately computer programming isn't my knack, but back then I didn't realize there are so many different other opportunities in computers, so I shied away from it to turn back in career wise when I got down the road in IT. The whole IT field's rapidly changing. It's huge. I don't even pretend to understand. Is that a good thing or a bad thing? Does it scare you? How does it impact you? For me it doesn't scare me because with anything, as people mentioned adapting your current position. My company's very large. I work with people that have been in their positions for 20 years in the same position, where I've only been doing it for two years. ...I actually got to go and take a couple weeks training to get certification from them, which was nice. I did enjoy that, but it was almost like the team I was on, if they let you go to the training it was something special. It was a reward, because even though I'm not in that department anymore I still have those certifications for Cisco that I have on my resume now. Do you think that it makes a difference, those certifications from Cisco Yes, because it's showing that I have aptitude and skills and certain products they sell. If I went to interview at a different company I could say, "I took these courses." It's another thing underneath my skillset.? (2)

I've actually moved up. I was the supervisor before, of the call center. I've moved my way around. I've been working on the phones for years. You might be in the escrow department. You have to learn insurance and taxes. There's research. I like it, because I can pick up and go somewhere else tomorrow and might not be doing what I'm doing today, but I have all this extra knowledge that I learned in the banking industry that I can jump—There's all different areas of— (3)

Respect and learn from the people that are out there. They've been there, they've done it. Try to take one or two things out of every person you know. That's what I did when I started. When I first started it was a whole different world back then. Everybody was afraid. You're the young guy coming in, you want their job. Until they got to know you and know that's far from the case. You just want to work with them. That's when they started teaching me how to run loaders, how to run road graders, how to do all the stuff that I know how to do now. I would not have had that opportunity if it wasn't for these guys. You became friends with them and learned from them. It took the fear away from them that you weren't going to try to take anything. (3)

Hopefully my associate's will be done in two years and then I will work for a year and just take my bachelor's classes in between working and going to school. How that's going to work out? I don't know yet. Then from there I'll just make sure the bachelor's is solidified and then I'll go get the doctorate for the nurse practitioner. (6)

I am at Orchard, Hiltz & McCliment. It's a civil engineering architecture planning firm. I am the corporate secretary. I've been there for 15 years this past May. But I started as an administrative assistant in the transportation department, I was there for a year. They're very sharp. They are, and they're talented, but other people are sharp as well in their own respective disciplines. My girlfriend talked to me, she said, "Tracy, just stick around. There are other opportunities." I did. The president at that time knows me and the HR director said, "Tracy, you need to get acquainted with the president. You need to go up there and make your presence known. I said okay. "He thinks you're shy," and he's like, "I like her, but she's quiet and I need to feel her out. I think she'll be a good fit for the corporate secretary role." I did, we got acquainted. I was promoted and I've been there ever since. It was a small position that I actually built. I developed it, I took on tasks, responsibilities. It's a plus, and it can be a minus because I work for the president. I have great stamina, and I am very proactive and I'm very dependent on it. I love what I do, this is my passion. I've been in this field for over 25 years, maybe 30. I went Detroit Legal Academy, court reporting, but that was back in the '80s, it's no longer there. Then, I have an associate's degree via various courses at Wayne Community College. Then I would take courses throughout the years to sharpen my computer skills and other (needs)— (7)

The importance of networking was also brought up by several participants. They know that in this ever-changing world, they need to be prepared for unforeseen curves. Many formally developed and nursed networks of friends, others in their field of work or frankly anyone who might be valuable to know should a job be needed.

Networking a million people when you're on a job and you see someone from another company come up or a big utility contract. I always wanted a job at National Grid so if I see guys from the Grid out, I try talking to them. I've been there a year. I tell them about what I do a little bit. They get a card, I give them my card, they give me their card or phone number. You see the guy out two weeks later. You're talking to him— (1)

(NETWORKING IS) highly important, especially in this town....I was born and raised here. I went to a community thing to advertise it. "Here's a black security company in Baltimore." One of the ladies I grew up with challenged me. "Richard, you get out on the community, you can also sell your company but also you're helping the community and some of your peers might want to give back." That got me in the networks and talking to people... (1)

As far as the skill set that I've learned and connecting with people in the automotive industry, it's a branch of fingers. You get to know lots of people because there are lots of mechanics, lots of dealers. It's an inner web. You get to utilize it over a career's time. It's never really gone away. Lots of connections all over the whole town. right from the get-go. That was breaded. I wanted it ever since I was young. (1)

I got that job through the previous job working at the adult care facility. I was hired there because I got the job lined up through the CPA that handled that, which also handled the accounting at the place I worked at before, where I was actually let go. There was a disagreement over a philosophy with the assistant to the owner of the company. I was the odd man out. I'd been warned before that the company would hire people to get the accounting cleaned up and up to speed and once it was up to speed, he'd let you go and coast for a while and get somebody else in to clean it up. I lost that job and was hooked into the one at the facility by the CPA, because he knew I was good at cleaning up messes. There was a mess there that a person there had left and had taken all the computer passwords with her and locked out the computer system. (3)

It's very important with who you know. It could take you a long way sometimes. I'm starting to be able to start my own business ...healthcare, just from networking with prior clients that I've had before and that they really like me. (8)

Even if I'm just going to a party, I have business cards in my purse just in case. You never know who's going to be there. You never know who you're going to meet. Maybe I'll take a picture with someone famous on there, but at the same time, I'm meeting so many people that something's going to happen eventually. If I have a connection to my brother's an agent. I'm constantly like, "I have a DJ over here and this guy over here does weddings, so if you're getting married..." I'm constantly in the middle of everything all the time. Networking is really important. ...The follow-up is critical, too. Like Vanessa said, get the cards, but make sure you take notes on the back of the card. The color tie the person had on, the conversation that you all had. That's what's critical because they get emails and calls all the time, but you have to make yourself memorable, in terms of networking. Just having great rapports with people. (8)

- **Ambition & Perseverance**

Finally, whether younger or older, pink collar or blue, male or female, from Buffalo or Detroit, our participants showed resilience, ambition and perseverance. When faced with challenges, they addressed them. When offered opportunities, they took them. When employers were demanding, they accepted the situation and met or exceeded expectations. When jobs were lost or disliked, they took the steps to find new jobs, to reposition themselves.

I'm not sure about indefinitely, but there's definitely room for advancement in the system. Once I take the test, I'll be at one level, and then I can always move on.... When I graduated school, it's a trade school, so I get the certificate that says I can write at up to 225 words a minute certified, although it does go higher. The state has to give tests to reporters and you have to get at least a 95 percent on it in order to get a new position or get a better job. I was hired for this job with the system, but I'll still have to take the placement test, just to make sure that I pass it. Then they'll offer me the position. (4)

Confidence is exactly right. It's cliché to say, "Everybody fails," or, "Ask a successful person, they'll say how many times they've failed," but that's true. You don't know what life has to offer. If you're just going to go and do what you've been told to do, it may not be what you want. If you need to change, change. ...I learned I've made a lot of mistakes. (4)

- **Positivity, Passion, Confidence & Self-reliance**

One somewhat surprising and pleasant finding from this series of focus groups was the degree to which our employees truly love what they do. And for those who don't love their jobs, they were at least highly committed to performing for their employer at a high level. Some regretted not pursuing other career paths, but virtually no one expressed regret at working too hard or caring too much about meeting or exceeding job expectations. They take pride in their work and truly feel an obligation to do their job to the very best of their ability. They're also confident of their abilities; they truly believe they're good at what they do and if they have doubts about shortcomings, they address them with training or extra efforts to become competent. Tied to these qualities is a streak of self-reliance, taking responsibility for not only what is required of them but also taking initiative to address any (appropriate) work task that needs attention.

I don't have a whole lot of experience but there are bosses I've had that want to be down on everything with the state. "This place sucks to work. Why would you want to work here?" I've had guys who are subordinates of mine say the same thing. You've just got to be positive. You've got to try to be positive where you are. Be happier collecting a paycheck every two weeks and you're not sitting on a street corner with a sign. You've got benefits, you're collecting a check even if it's part-time. (1)

I already did a business plan and everything, so that's my goal. It's going to be my laundromat (4)

You really don't until sometimes you're in the field, to say, "This is what I like to do," this is your passion. To have the hands-on experience sometimes. For me, I don't have the hands-on experience as a legal assistant, but I know that's my passion. That's what I want to do. Also, as far as education, you're never too late, you're never too old to get your education. (4)

Create your journey Yes. A very specific book. Napoleon Hill's Think and Grow Rich. The book is not just about money. It's about life, about using your brain to create the life that you want. The past is gone. It's bye-bye, toodles. It doesn't exist anymore. What we're all talking about is our futures and where we're going. Just as this table existed only in someone's head at one time, your future exists in your head. Unless you define it or can believe in it, then it's not going to become a physical reality like this table did. You take what you want, create it in your head first, and then you will find your hands producing it in the world. (5)

Find your passion. I don't want to tell them, "Don't further their education." Everybody is not college material. They got through school, high school, 12 years.

Find something you love, because if not, you're going to keep jumping. You're going to jump. Then eventually you'll be 40, stuck on a job that you really don't like. You've already had nine, 10 jobs. By 25, you should really be settled down. "This is what I like." Find your passion. If you find your passion you will love what you do and you'll get your job. (8)

Figure it out. Yes. Just jump out of the airplane and build it on your way down. A lot of people just don't have access to things that they want to do immediately. I'm a master Googler. Anyone that knows me knows I'm a master. I will figure it out. Really, a lot of people don't go for their dreams because they're afraid, but you only live once. You have to trust whatever comes your way. (8)