

**Degrees? Why? Why Not?**

by [**Chris Twist**](https://qlifemagazine.com/lasvegas/qlife-lasvegas-june-2017/degrees-why-why-not)

I was talking with my brother and how he doesn’t use the degree that he has. He is so much happier as a bartender than he would have been as a physical therapist. It made me think about how there must be other people who have degrees and don’t use them. How do they feel about this? How are they doing now? How do they feel about not using their degrees? Why did they want to change their field? How did their family react to your career switch?

So, let’s start learning about people who have degrees but are not using them in their work. I bet that there are many of who have degrees that you are not using right now. Now, that doesn’t mean that you will never use your degree. Nobody knows that. It’s in the future, and nobody knows about the future.

**Michael Erle**

**Why did you first choose physical therapy?**

I chose physical therapy because I thought that as long as I made over $70,000 a year, then I would consider myself a success. I was also a lost teen without direction, and my parents thought I would be a failure if I didn’t pick a career and fast. It took me until I finally completed my degree as a physical therapist assistant to finally realize that physical therapy wasn’t for me and that sometimes having an impressive bank account isn’t exactly what makes a human being a success.

**What are you doing now, and how long have you been doing it?**

After physical therapy, I tried working as a photographer and zip line operator for a family-friendly zip line company in Las Vegas. While I worked there, I also worked close to a rooftop bar. The view was gorgeous, and I would see the local bartenders having a blast while working. I thought to myself that I want to have that kind of fun! I was tired of working to make other people happy. Now I’ve been bar backing at a newly open Dave & Buster’s for six months, and I started bartending at a locals bar called Thunderbird Lounge, and I love it!

**How did your family react to your career switch, both when this just happened and now? Are they fine now?**

My mother absolutely EXPLODED when she found out, but my dad didn’t think a thing of it. My mom thought those two years of work and dedication was all for nothing. She thought who cares if you’re unhappy as long as you have a sizeable paycheck. I rather think the opposite. What’s the point of having loads of cash just to wipe your tears away with $20 bills as if they’re tissues? It took my mother years to fully realize that I needed to live my life for myself. I had to show her that I have never had a better head on my shoulders since I’ve switched careers towards bartending. Now that’d I’m becoming more and more successful at an astonishingly rapid pace, she’s found her peace with it and I have her full support.

**What did you learn from this?**

I found out that degrees aren’t for everybody. I learned that there are other ways to get what you want. Families will usually think that degrees are the only way for their sons/daughters to live well and be happy, but this isn’t always true.

Now, let’s read about a person who has a degree but doesn’t feel unacceptable in any way just because he isn’t using it.

**James Joseph Brown**

What did you think was going to happen when you were done with your MFA, and what actually happened?

I always presumed that after I finished my MFA I would be doing exactly what I was doing when I began. I wasn't suffering from any delusions that my degree would give me any chance of earning a living wage as a university instructor because there really is no such thing as earning a living wage as a university instructor when the vast majority of teaching positions are filled by adjuncts who receive poverty level wages, no benefits, and no job security.

I never expected the degree to actually lead to gainful employment in my field. I simply thought I might be better qualified to do what I was already doing, which was working on a novel, publishing short stories and essays in literary journals, and hoping to make some slight progress in my career as a writer.

What ended up happening after I graduated was that I kept working at a casino on the Strip at night and writing during the day.

Eventually this became unsustainable, mainly because the casino job was a dead-end with bad working conditions and no chance for advancement. Without medical benefits from my employer (most gaming employees have to wait years, in my case almost five, before they became eligible for health benefits) I ended up falling deeply into debt after a visit to the hospital.

In 2015 I realized that I could find almost no viable options for someone with my education and experience to stay afloat in America so I found a job teaching English abroad, in Saudi Arabia, which pays an excellent wage, provides free housing, and best of all, covers all medical expenses.

**Did you like working as a game employee?**

No. The working conditions were terrible. You had to breathe second hand smoke all the time and no matter what the quantity it is extremely dangerous and has detrimental effects on your health. In most of my former workplaces there was very loud music playing all the time. I now have severe respiratory issues and just found out I suffered hearing loss as well as a result of my ten years working in this environment.

The worst part though is that you were treated as less than a person, all the time, by everyone. Your employer doesn't value you and constantly reminds you that you are replaceable and should never ask for anything, not a raise, not health benefits, nothing. And the clientele can be so outrageously hostile and abusive toward you when you are just doing your job it is amazing to me it is allowed to go on at all, but it does, because there is so much money at stake.

**Now, you are working for BlueForce Inc. Are you happier now, as a teacher for English?**

Life is one thousand percent better working in a safe, civilized environment where I feel respected and where my work is valued. I am paid well, and that has made all the difference. Any slogan that an employer feeds you about how your happiness is important to them while paying you poverty level wages is complete bullshit. I was unable to be happy when I was constantly falling further into debt even while working very hard and living on a shoestring budget. The thing that changed it for me was not only working at a job which I enjoy, but one which treats me well and compensates me well for the work I do. Since I started working in Saudi Arabia I have paid off tens of thousands of dollars in medical bills. I have put money in the bank. And I have even gotten to take real vacations. I get over two months PAID vacation now. I didn't even get two minutes paid anything when I worked as a dealer. No sick days, no vacation, nothing. Now I have everything I need and I'm much, much happier.

**If you could do it again, would you change fields/degrees?**

Maybe. I would still want an MFA in creative writing because I found it to be a singular experience, unlike any other, which contributed immeasurably to my growth as a writer. But I would probably study something else for undergrad. Undergrad degrees don't matter too much anyway. Maybe I would study something that could have gotten me a job right out of college, if such a thing exists.

From this man, James Joseph Brown helps me to see that degrees aren’t always about work and money. Sometimes just getting the degree is enough of a reason to do it. He never thought that he would really work as a story writer, but that doesn’t why he got this degree. He got it because he needed to know that he could do it, that he is and was always a strong writer.

Next month, we will have a few more people who have degrees but do not use them. Each of them are distinct and different, and this makes these people very compelling. Next month, you will read more about people who have degrees but don’t use them, and we will see their emotions, thoughts, and their awareness.