

# WORDS OF ADVICE FROM ALUMNI WHO GRADUATED INTO THE GREAT RECESSION

*We hope you find some nuggets of wisdom in their stories.*

My career has been shaped by recessions, but it has not been unsuccessful, and the same can be true for you. I've always been a nerd and enjoyed coding, but witnessing the early 2000s tech crash first-hand in San Francisco, where I grew up, deterred me from fully investing my career in tech. I kept coding—but as a hobby. At Reed, I studied with the intent of becoming a teacher or social worker.

However, I graduated into . . . yet another recession: “The Great Recession.” This left me and many of my peers in part-time, low-paying jobs. I looked around for what industries were still doing well through this recession. I saw tech was continuing to hire and grow, so I renewed my on-again-off-again interest in coding and got into software engineering. I studied every lunch break, every night, and every morning before and after my low-paying job until I was able to land a coding job and pull myself into a life of some comfort.

What is my point here? In one recession, the tech industry was devastated, but in another recession, the tech industry was thriving. Times of economic change often bring great loss, but they can bring opportunity as well. It's certainly been true through my life that the key skill in any circumstance is to be wary and able to adapt quickly to change; this will probably be the case throughout

your career as well. Great rewards can arrive to those who navigate turbulent times successfully.

—CYD LA LUZ, CLASS OF 2010

I graduated in May 2008. I empathize with the experience of finishing college during a time of great upheaval. The bad news is that the path is harder, but the good news is that Reed leaves you prepared to figure things out from first principles. I have three pieces of advice.

First, go easy on yourself. You may not have the immediate opportunities that you hoped for, but those expectations came from different circumstances.

Second, don't worry about the “right” field. You may find opportunities that aren't what you ultimately want for your career. That's actually encouraged. I find all my experience—including canvassing for Greenpeace, writing business plans, selling insurance, and grad school—valuable almost every day.

Finally, you are an expert in your subject, but there's so much to learn. A Reed education will make you successful over the long arc of life, but you will probably need to pick up some job-specific skills. It may feel like starting from scratch. The critical thinking, argumentation, assignment triage, and synthesis skills that you've honed at Reed will be incredibly valuable in time.

You likely won't make big decisions and wrestle with the thorniest problems right away. Know that those opportunities will present themselves. You know how to answer tough questions; you've been learning since your first Hum conference. Focus on the learning, with confidence that you're among the best at that. Good luck, enjoy the journey, and know that your fellow alumni are here to help.

—ANDREI STEPHENS, CLASS OF 2008

I went through Reed with no real career plan or goal in mind. I thought I might be a teacher or a school counselor, but I graduated in 2009 knowing I could keep my part-time job that paid me \$900 a month and that seemed good at the time. I worked a variety of part-time jobs for a while and kept things humming along until my former boss had a position open for a full-time job with the parks department. I thought I could do that for a year or two while I figured out what I “really wanted to do.” Turns out the next three years I spent working for Portland Parks & Recreation became the foundation of my career and ignited a passion for parks.

I think my lack of expectations for a specific career path allowed me to try new things and weather the recession while developing other interests and hobbies. The things I most love to do aren't the things that make me any money, and that's fine. I am open to my life taking a variety of paths—maybe I'll get a graduate degree in my 40s? Maybe I'll completely change careers in a few years? The beginning of your career is just that—the beginning. It will pivot and shift and wind around or start off slow or in a direction you were not expecting. Be open to it.

—CHARLI KRAUSE, CLASS OF 2009

You might not get the job you want right off the bat, but that doesn't

mean you aren't headed in the right direction. If my options had been better when I graduated, I probably would not have started my own business—which turned out to be so much better for me in the long run.

What I wish I had known when I graduated is that mentors love helping you. You may be getting the advice that you should try to help or have something to offer when networking. But in the first few years after graduation, I really felt like I had no connections, skills, resources, etc., to give. What I know now is that when people come to me for anything I'm beyond excited to use my network to help them. As long as you treat your mentor's time with respect, you are actually doing them a favor.

No matter how challenging things get, some people will always succeed. Sure, maybe only a handful of people get where you want to go. Why not you? You made it through Reed, and that's no easy feat. If you're willing to work hard enough (and you're pointed in the right direction), you will achieve your goals.

—EMILY CORSO, CLASS OF 2010

No amount of economic uncertainty comes close to the tragedy you have experienced of parting with your community and your Reed family unexpectedly, and before some of the most important moments that you would be sharing together. Your thesis parade. Your last Renn Fayre and Hum Play. Your graduation. This is such a loss, and I see you and hope you are honoring that loss.

Unfortunately, there will be times in your life when the situation is just this bad. The perspective I can share with you is that this happens, sometimes it lasts for a long time, and what you can do is the best you can for yourself and your community, and then one day it is over. You have thousands of Reed alumni standing behind you right now to help you do the best you can,

and what I can do here is offer some practical career advice and hopefully help you picture at least what the next few years may look like for you on that front.

I graduated from Reed in 2009 with a degree in math and thankfully was able to find a technical position in a field that was still hiring through the recession. If you don't know what you want to do yet, look for the industries that are growing (like healthcare)—you'll be more likely to start a career there than those that aren't (like travel). Contacting Reed alumni will be the most fun and effective way to search for a job. If there's something you know you want to do and can't find that first job now, find ways to get that experience (like volunteering). It will be much easier to break into something when you have relevant experience and skills.

Finally, you may spend 8+ hours per day doing what you do in your career—find positive environments that feel like what you've loved about Reed and other communities you've been part of. Think of how you can change the world for the better in your work in a way that is authentic to who you are. As Obama said to recent graduates, "this is your generation's world to shape," and I can't wait to see the innovative and compassionate impact that comes from all of you in the years to come.

—CLARA SIEGEL, CLASS OF 2009

1. **Y**our career isn't a race. In the next few years, your classmates and friends will (hopefully) get really great jobs with impressive titles at fancy companies. They'll go to top-tier grad schools and write books. And at moments you'll feel left behind. It's OK. The truth is: in five years it all shakes out and you learn the guy from your dorm who is suddenly a "Director" on LinkedIn was at a start-up of 4 people. You get to call yourself whatever you want when you're at a start-up.

2. The first job can pigeonhole you . . . but not forever. I graduated during the recession. I built the first part of my career around my most professional skill: event planning. After five years of planning fundraising events, though, I knew that couldn't be the long-term plan. I needed to pivot to something more interesting that would make more money. The thing is when you get good at something it becomes very hard to move out of that particular niche. But I got my MBA, found a fast-growing company, made my goals clear to my manager, and now get to do a bunch of cool marketing campaigns and solve interesting problems.

3. This job hunt will be the hardest. I know that is the opposite of inspiring—sorry, it's (probably) true though. For me, the first two years of piecing together part-time jobs was exhausting. I never felt more hopeless. After a while, it worked out and I landed somewhere for a few years that challenged me (and gave me the title 'manager!'). More recently, I was laid off due to COVID-19. I knew this job search would be different, though. My professional experience, my Reed education, and my MBA made me valuable. My professional network sent me job postings and introductions to hiring managers. Recruiters were reaching out to me. CEOs messaged me! One of those CEOs offered me a position for a lot more money and with a fancy title (because it's a start-up). Reedie, I took it.\*

\*Bronte quotation butchering because #reed.

—CAROLL CASBEER, CLASS OF 2010

