



Title: Blue Collar and Proud of It

Grade: 8

Career Development Model:

Self-Awareness • Career Exploration • Career Planning & Management

Nebraska Career Readiness Standards:

- Communicates effectively & appropriately
- Manages personal career development

Objective:

- Students will identify categories of jobs known as “blue collar” occupations.
- Students will assess the opportunities and advantages of these types of occupations as viable careers in the current labor market.
- Students will investigate labor market information and demand for occupations.

Materials and Supplies Needed:

- Computers with Internet;
- Projector, screen, and video/audio connections;
- Prepared handouts of job possibilities;
- Markers;
- “Hammer Time” Interview of Joe Lamacchia.

Class Instructions:

1. Teachers introduce the lesson by explaining to students that a lot of emphasis in high school is placed on going to a four-year college. While the value of a four-year college education ought to continue to be promoted, the truth is that for some students, the path to a successful and satisfying work life will not be best reached by earning a traditional four-year degree. Given the statistics about four-year college dropouts coupled with the reality of workforce shortages in some blue-collar jobs, it is appropriate for students to have the opportunity to gain information about blue-collar occupations, develop an appreciation for that type of work and its value to our society, and for some, see this type of work as a viable option. It is also important to remember that many blue-collar jobs still require further education and training in the form of apprenticeships, training programs, and two-year college degrees.
OPTIONAL: Have students generate the advantages and disadvantages of blue-collar jobs.
2. Facilitate a class or small group discussion around the following questions:
 - a. What thoughts come to mind when you hear the term “blue-collar”?

- b. What is a blue-collar job?
 - c. How is it different from a white-collar job?
 - d. Do you know anyone who works a blue-collar job?
 - e. Do you think some people have a negative view of blue-collar jobs? Why?
3. Distribute copies of the "Hammer Time" interview of Joe Lamacchia to students. Ask for two volunteers to read this interview as the interviewer and the interviewee. Alternatively, have several students in the classroom take turns playing these roles.
4. Ask students the following questions to stimulate discussion:
 - a. Why do you think there is a push for all students to go to 4-year colleges?
 - b. Why do you think this push exists?
 - c. Is a four-year college the best route for everyone?
5. Break students into small groups. Before the class begins, prepare 15 handouts on Microsoft Word. At the top of each handout, type a blue-collar profession (you may consider any from the list below, or choose your own). Below this, split the sheet in half with a vertical line. On the top of the left half, type ASSUMPTIONS, and at the top of the right, type KNOWNNS. Circulate the sheets between groups, having each group spend one to two minutes documenting their assumptions.
(Electrician, Landscaper, Beautician, Mason, Fence Erector, Paving, House Cleaner, Auto Body Repair, Automobile Mechanic, Construction Carpenter, Nail Technician, Construction Laborer, Demolition Laborer, Elevation Installer, Farm Managers, Waitress, Locomotive Engineers, Power-Plant Operators, Rail Road Conductors, Bus Driver, Roofer, Plumber, Welder)
6. When the sheets stop at their final groups (or after the teacher is satisfied that the sheet has rotated enough to gather a good list of assumptions), have the final groups research the professions' KNOWNNS online. O*NET would be a good website to use. Ask students to research salary, skills, and training. Also ask them to investigate the ASSUMPTIONS, if possible.
7. Have groups post their sheets around the room, and each present their findings to the class. Emphasize the contrasts between assumptions and knownns.
8. Discuss with the class. What did they notice?

Credits/Sources:

Making my
FUTURE
WORK

“Making my Future Work: A College and Career Readiness Program”, U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences.

<https://www.csuohio.edu/cehs/mmfw/making-my-future-work-0>

Hammer time

By CHRIS ERIKSON

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If the recipe for success is to study hard, get into a good college, score a desk job and claw your way into a corner office, then Joe Lamacchia can only be called a miserable failure.

If this bothers him, though, he's doing an exceptionally good job of hiding it. By all appearances, the 50-year-old father of five is a happy man. He loves his job running a landscaping business outside Boston, and takes pride in his work and the business he built from scratch.

There's a lesson in this, and Lamacchia wants teachers, parents, guidance counselors and above all America's youth to hear it. Blue-collar work, whether it's planting shrubs, pounding nails, turning engines or laying bricks, can be just as rewarding as carrying a briefcase. In fact, it can be a whole lot more rewarding, if you're not the sedentary type, or if the alternative is a corporate purgatory of cubicles brimming with spreadsheets and quiet desperation.

What's more, the world needs more cubicle dwellers a whole lot less than it needs, say, welders. Many a blue-collar profession is starved for workers, as kids are force-fed the notion that blue-collar work is for losers and that college is the only route to career fulfillment.

One result, says Lamacchia, is a lot of kids who are made to feel like failures if book-learning is not their thing, just like he did when he was a floundering high school student with a rotten attitude and worse grades. Another is high numbers of college dropouts, unemployed graduates and miserable office drones who secretly long to use their hands for something other than tapping on a computer keyboard.

Something needed to be done, he decided. So a few years ago he started a Web site, bluecollarandproudoft.com. He started giving talks, telling high school students that blue-collar workers are "America's backbone." And now he's written a book, "Blue Collar and Proud of It: The all-in-One Resource for Finding Freedom, Financial Success and Security Outside the Cubicle." Co-written with Bridget Samburg, it's part resource directory, part career guide and part manifesto.

"We don't all want to sit in cubicles, pushing paper, working in middle-management jobs, traveling around the country for business meetings," he writes. "I want more people to think about the alternatives and realize that you can be proud about going into a trade. A blue-collar career can be a choice that you feel good about as opposed to a fallback option."

On a break from laying asphalt for a driveway last week, Lamacchia spoke to @ work about the joys of honest labor, the looming demand for tradespeople and why it's "time to restore pride in America's blue-collar workforce."

How would you sum up the message of the book?

Success is not just found from going to college. I'm not knocking college, but we're all not cut out to go to a four-year school. Somehow in the last 20 or 30 years college became grade 13. But to throw all these kids into the same trough and say, "Go" – it's not right. A third drop out the first year, half can't find a job at the end of four.

We have an education bubble in this country, like a housing bubble. There's going to be 40 million jobs available in the next 15 years for people that don't have a bachelor's degree. We're producing too much of what we don't need and not enough of what we do need.

Where has the perception come from that blue-collar work is second rate, and that working in an office is better by definition?

You've got to turn it back. If you talk to people today they'll say they're a stockbroker or they're an architect or a software engineer. If you ask, "What did your dad do?" they'll say, "Oh, he was a sheet metal guy," "He was a plumber." That's how we rose up, in the '30s, '40s, '50s, '60s, and it kind of turned. Maybe it was money, or they found that they didn't want to get as dirty, or work as hard. You know, Nintendo put a lot of these kids on the couch.

In what ways is the notion that blue-collar work is second rate communicated?

I can't argue – over a lifetime, a white-collar person earns more money than a blue-collar person. But you now what? If you're making 90 grand and you're miserable, maybe you could make 75 grand and be happy as can be.

You should see the e-mails I get. Like, "I'm 34 years old, I'm sitting in a cubicle, with the hard candies and the pictures of my kids." And they say, "God, I love the weekends – I built a deck last weekend with my neighbor. I used to build when I was a kid. Is it too late?" I get them all the time. And they just sound so unhappy.

A key point you make in the book is that the blue-collar sector is full of opportunity right now.

We're on our way to 400 million people in this country by 2050. That's a lot of apartments, houses, roads, bridges, etc., etc. Meanwhile, the infrastructure of the country's falling apart at the seams. The secretary of transportation, Ray LaHood, was on the radio a couple months ago and said, "America's become one big pothole."

There's a lot of work – it's on the way. It's an exciting time. I tell people, if you're 35 and you're in the cubicle, don't wait 10 years, because right now is the time. With the stimulus money, I've never heard numbers like this -- \$61 billion for roads and bridges? \$38 billion for the greening of America?

Where are the biggest shortages right now?

Welders, auto mechanics and electricians are the big ones. During Hurricane Katrina they had to bring in welders from Egypt and Vietnam. We don't have enough.

You point to the green sector as a big potential source of jobs.

The blue-collar person is going to take this country green collar, not academia. The electrician's going to be on the rood putting in solar panels, the plumber's going to be putting in a low-flush toilet. Wind turbine plants – we have the Saudi Arabia of wind from the Dakotas to Dallas, Texas.

That's an exciting thing, to turn this country green. A lot of parents should love that – wouldn't it be exciting to have your kid be part of greening this country?

You talk about the pressure kids feel that they'll be seen as failures if they don't go to college. Did you feel that?

My dad was a CPA for Raytheon. He went to work in a suit, tie, and briefcase – some mornings he even smelled good. And he realized, Joey's not going to go to college. He was very accepting of it, and he said, "Whatever you do, try to be the best." The guidance counselors, teachers, they were a little flip – they'd say, "You're not college material."

I have a wicked case of attention deficit disorder. And it's a scary feeling to sit there and wonder, why can't I comprehend? What's wrong with me? Once I got to high school I was able to go out and work, and I realized I was actually pretty smart, and that part of the problem at school was that I was bored. There's a lot of us out there. And to sit at a desk and somehow make it to senior year, and to go four more – it's like torture.

But what I tell kids, I say, you know, we're not stupid, we know what makes us feel good. When I wheelbarrow asphalt I feel good, when I shovel I feel good. When we put 30 bushes across the front of a house and mulch it and we're out of there by 4 o'clock and it looks great, it feels good.

What you're describing is probably the biggest thing missing for a lot of office workers – that tangible thing you can point to that you've accomplished at the end of the day.

No, they have to wait months for a project. And at end of the day, most days we're done. The brick patio's in, or the driveway's in, or the beautiful bushes – it's instant.

How do you change the attitude that blue-collar work is something to avoid?

We all can't go to college, and people have got to speak up and say it. If you don't want to go, you shouldn't be frowned upon. It should be, "Go for it, buddy, go ahead. Go to electrician's school, and I'll probably call you in two years to wire my basement up."

But the pressure is tremendous. Everyone wants to press the coffee pot in the morning, and run the car, and sit on the deck and use the street light and drive on the asphalt, but nobody wants to have their kid be a part of that.

You make the point that a lot of blue-collar jobs are pretty high-tech at this point.

Oh, no question. I bring my truck in to have the transmission checked, and he used to say, "We've got to pull it out." Now he says, "I'll check the codes and call you." Welding is math and science now. I tell kids today, "This is not grandpa's factory floor."

These are skilled jobs. Master electrician, master plumber. If you were in corporate America and you were 55 and you went and applied for a job, they'd say, "Goodbye." If you're 55 and you say, "For 35 years I've been a master electrician," they'd go, "What, really?" They'd reel you in.

Do you feel like people are receptive to your message?

I see a difference in the last year, since the 401(k) went in the toilet. People aren't so quick anymore to take out the college loans. They're like, "Maybe I better think this through about little Bobby. Is it cut out for him?"

You like to cite a 2004 study in the UK, where blue-collar workers were found to be the happiest of all employees. What do you think is behind that?

It's a nice life! If you're a skilled craftsman, you can pick up your tools and go work anywhere you want. We're not living out of a suitcase, we're not out at the airport. We're home in the evening for our kid's Little League game, for our daughter's play. There are great jobs.

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