

## My First Job!

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YOU GUYS HAVE DONE IT ALL. FROM LANDSCAPER TO PROFESSTIONAL WRESTLER TO PUBLIC PROSECUTOR, AMERICA'S RETAIL JEWELERS HAVE SOME INCREDIBLY FASCINATING RESUMES.

We recently asked our Brain Squad members to share with us their first jobs and tell us how those experiences impacted what they do today. While some of the responses suggested the storyline of a Hollywood blockbuster, most were more along the lines of a Horatio Alger novel, where the down-and-out fellow always made good through hard work and determination. Most people we heard from agree on one point: No matter what their first job was, it taught them skills they still use today — except, of course, Tim Harold Jr. of William Harold Jewelers in Newport Beach, CA, who's still scratching his head over what he learned from strapping kids into a bungee harness on a trampoline. Read on to hear how others finished this sentence:

font-family : Verdana, Geneva, Arial, Helvetica, sans-serif;font-size : 15px;color: #333333;font-weight : bold;My first job was \_\_\_\_\_.

### ON THE ROAD FAMILY TIME

As a traveling salesman doing industrial sales. I started my store so that I could get off the road and spend more time with my family.

Steve Stempinski  
Steve's Place  
Madison, GA

### AT THE STORE FUN SEARCH

Bringing coffee to customers in my parents' jewelry store when I was 7. At 8 years old, my first paying job was restringing pearls and beads. At 16, I didn't think being in the family business was very fun, so a girlfriend and I got a summer job being maids at a motel. What was I thinking?

Teri Vogan Vogan Gold & Silver Works  
Colorado  
Springs, CO

### IN THE MILL MEAN LESSON

In a steel mill when I was in high school. It was dirty, hot, mean and a real education. I grew up fast, and I swore that I would never work in that world if at all possible.

Alan Meltzer  
Art's Diamond Jewelers  
Canton, OH

### ON THE BRINY IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION

Scraping fish bilges at the Port of Palm Beach in Florida. I learned that if you don't get an education, you may very well go through life stinking. I hold a BA in management and a graduate gemologist diploma from the GIA. Thankfully, I now own a very successful company but shower regularly nonetheless.

Chuck Kuba  
Iowa Diamond  
Des Moines, IA

## IN THE AIR SATISFYING EXPERIENCE

As a flight attendant for Delta. I learned how important customer satisfaction is to the overall experience — whether it's making someone feel welcome, trying to anticipate their needs, or just listening when sometimes that's all that's needed to satisfy an unhappy client.

Jody Bond  
Just Gold Jewelers  
Stuart, FL

## ON THE FARM HARD DAY'S WORK

Picking produce on my grandparents' farm and selling it to customers at the market when I was 15. I worked this job for three summers and learned four valuable lessons: 1. A good hard day's work never hurt anyone. We would work from sun-up to sundown. Those were some long days. Even though I worked hard it never seemed to put that much more money in my pocket. 2. Work smarter not harder. I realized that to make any real money and be successful, I would need to further my education and use this knowledge to reach my full potential. 3. Be thankful for an air-conditioned/heated working environment where I get to dress and be a professional. 4. Dealing with the public is not always easy. Some customers are more difficult than others. But treat every customer equally.

Stephen Barnes  
Barnes Jewelers  
Goldsboro, NC

## BELOW THE KNEES TIPS FOR TOTS

Shining shoes from age 10 till I started in the jewelry business at the ripe old age of 14. I learned that how well I interacted with the customer dictated how much my tip would be. It's the same in jewelry: the better I interact with the customer, the more she buys from me and the more frequently she shops.

John Laughter  
Shelley's Jewelry  
Hendersonville, NC

## BEHIND THE COUNTER EARLY BENCHMARK

Sweeping and cleaning the store for my father when I was 9 years old. He taught me how to take links out of stretch watchbands and how to use the engraving machine. The first person I tried to help, though, laughed in my face when I said, "May I help you, ma'am?"

Billy Smith  
Smith Jewelers  
Franklin, VA

## IN THE BOOKS HOW NOT TO DO IT

As a part-time bookkeeper for the needle trade. I actually was just a college freshman and didn't really know any accounting yet, but I kept up by checking how my predecessor had done things. It wasn't too hard. I learned about the nitty-gritty of business, how the owner talked to the suppliers ("Ya got to sharpen your pencil!"), how to stretch the payables longer and longer ("The check's in the mail, I swear!"), and as a naive young girl, how to beware of the owner's brother, who would ask me to try on some of the coats, then try to "adjust" them on my body! Mostly, I learned how not to conduct business: Ever since, the first rule for me has been to always, always, pay my bills on time.

Eve Alfill?

Eve J. Alfill? Gallery & Studio  
Evanston, IL

#### AT THE POLISHER QUALITY INSPIRATION

For a one-man trade shop. He needed a polisher. At 12 I had already been making jewelry for two years, so it was a good match. He believed in doing good quality work, he enjoyed making jewelry and he was ambitious enough to open a store a couple years after I started with him. The accomplishment he and his wife made with their store inspired me to open my own store several decades later.

Peter Tims  
White Mountain Jewelers  
Show Low, AZ

#### IN THE WARD TOUGH CUSTOMERS

In a mental health facility. I wanted to save the world, but working there I found the world was interested only in getting their checks on time. The experience does help with certain customers, though!

Barry Tricker  
Stowe Gems  
Stowe, VT

#### IN THE INDUSTRY COUNTER INTELLIGENCE

As an independent sales rep for several fine jewelry manufacturers. I traveled all over New England selling for 15 years. That job gave me confidence to speak and work with strangers, taught me that it is a mistake to make judgments about people without giving them a chance. I know now what it feels like to be on the other side of the counter. I show respect for my sales reps by keeping my appointments and listening to what they have to say, knowing that they see a lot out there. I also find it helpful to know my competition from the inside.

Kai Armstrong  
Galatea Fine Jewelry  
Milton Village, MA

#### ABOARD THE QUEEN MARY CREDIBILITY BUILDER

As a tour guide on the Queen Mary in Long Beach, CA, when I was 19. My job was to gather up 30 to 40 paying customers, herd them along narrow passages and tell them everything there was to know about the history of the Cunard line, '30s and '40s movie stars who sailed aboard, the finer points of turbine steam engines, nautical navigation and the history of World War II. Needless to say, I started each tour with a credibility problem to overcome. I was standing up before a group of strangers, presenting myself as an expert, dealing with questions I didn't always know the answer to, and sometimes dealing with unhappy (and vocal) people. Looking back 30 years later I can't imagine a better training ground for jewelry sales.

Kevin Stevenson  
Johnson Jewelers  
Bellflower, CA

#### BEFORE THE BENCH THREATS V. PROMISES

As an assistant state attorney in Miami under Janet Reno. I practiced in the office for 11 years and worked my way up from juvenile and county court to domestic crimes, narcotics, organized crime and lastly, a division chief trying high publicity homicide cases. I feel that my experience as a prosecutor was definitely helpful in my career as a jeweler since I developed excellent listening skills, reading people's body language and being a good judge of character. These are all

skills I still practice daily in the store. My transition from prosecutor to jeweler was due primarily to my husband Ed's concern for my safety and that of our young daughter. The caliber of people I was dealing with and the common threats that were made did not sit well with him. Ed's dream was always to open a high-end jewelry store, and when the town center was developed in the city within which we live, we jumped on it. Do I miss prosecuting? People ask me all the time, and yes, a part of me does, but when a customer leaves and says, they'll be back to see me, I look forward to it and don't worry about when they'll be released from prison!

Tracey Dikes  
Weston Jewelers  
Weston, FL

#### ON THE ROPES BURNOUT

As a professional wrestler. I left the field of jewelry making in 1979 and became a pro wrestler, which among other things taught me about people and life, as I lived in many places. But most of all I think it was good to leave the jewelry business and go out and see and do a lot of things and then when the time was right I quit and went back to the jewelry trade. That probably kept me from burning out on jewelry.

Manoli Savvenas  
Manoli's Jewelers  
Springfield, MO

#### AT THE PLANT WELDING 101

At my dad's driveshaft manufacturing plant when I was a 13-year-old girl, with pigtails and braces. I swept floors, operated an automatic welder and cut bar stock. Basically I got very dirty. I was covered in grease from mid-chest to mid-thigh. I worked with a bunch of guys every day who liked to give me crap and spit on the floor. I've cleaned up a bit since then, but my husband says he fell in love with me because I could weld!

Kari Akers  
Akers & Akers of Fine Jewelry  
Topeka, KS

#### AT THE TABLE FILLED ORDERS

Waitressing in high school. It brought a wealth of information about customer service. What I stress to my employees in repairs is to look at that job repair as a food order: The customer wants a hot meal in a reasonable amount of time. If you can't fill the order quickly and efficiently, the customer gets tired of waiting and leaves, never to return. Give your customers the service they want.

Connie Kasper  
Phillip Randolph Jewelers  
Corpus Christi, TX

#### IN THE WAREHOUSE COMPANY RUNNER

As an order picker in the warehouse of a theater supply company. When I left 2-1/2 years later, I was the assistant to the vice president. It was a great learning experience for me, because up until then, I hadn't had any formal business training, and while working there, I was involved in every aspect of running a company. It didn't directly influence my decision to get into the jewelry business, but a friend of the family who owned two jewelry stores knew of my success and one night asked me if I would like to join him in a third store. The rest is history. I've been in the business now for 33 years.

Chris W. Taylor  
Taylormade Jewelers  
Glen Rock, NJ

## FOR THE BIG GUYS GENETIC PREDISPOSITION

At Zales. In the spring of my 16th year I wrote my dad's cousin, Morris Zale, to ask him for a job. The letter was typed properly, and much to my surprise, I got a handwritten note from Cousin Morris. As was his habit he wrote it on the bottom of my letter (which is framed and hanging in my office). He told me I could work anywhere Zales had an operation. His son, Marvin, was running the diamond office in New York. That's where I headed with my younger brother, Danny. We had a great time living at the Y at 92nd and Lexington and working at the diamond office at 15 West 47th. I still remember the first day's breakfast at Chock full o'Nuts. Just to be in the middle of the industry at that age was an awesome experience. I got to see all the aspects of that office and even spent a week in a diamond-cutting room. I think that's where my genetic predisposition for jewelry really kicked in and set me on this course to pursue a career in this industry.

Jim Kruger  
Kruger's Diamond Jewelers  
Austin, TX

## ON A TRAMPOLINE SPRINGBOARD?

Strapping kids to bungee cords and jumping them on a trampoline. I've thought long and hard, and in no way does it relate to what I do now.

Tim Harold Jr.  
William Harold Jewelers  
Newport Beach, CA

## IN A BAR RESPECT FOR MONEY

Working at a bar at 15 years of age in Milwaukee, WI, where I was born and raised. The owner was Sicilian, a very smart businessman, great with his money, all the way down to how he kept it in his pocket: all facing the same way, keeping them neat and in order of largest to smallest denomination. He always got rid of the worst, worn bills first, which means I got them, and consequently got rid of them first also! He is the reason I have been known to iron my bills when they are too worn and wrinkled to suit me, much to the amusement of my family. He also taught me trust, and that a good job was satisfying. My job was to clean up the entire bar each morning that I worked. He would drop me off after feeding me breakfast, and leave me there until he was done with his errands, which was usually much longer than I needed to complete my work. I was allowed to drink as much soda as I wanted, but the beer and booze were off limits, and I never abused his trust. I would be picked up and fed lunch, and often had dinner at their home ... his wife made the best sauce! Watching him deal with people, employees and customers, how fair he was with all of them, really shaped how I too deal with people — both the enjoyable ones, as well as the difficult.

Tim Ottmann  
The Gem Gallery  
Reno, NV

## IN A MALL JEWELRY OVER SHOES

As a jewelry store assistant manager. My story begins as a college sophomore who was looking for a job. A friend suggested that I go apply at a shoe store. Fortunately, when I went to apply for this job, the owner had just hired another guy from my business class. The store owner was very nice though, and suggested that I go next door to the jewelry store and speak to the owner. He knew that he had fired his assistant manager a few months before.

When I walked into this smallish "shotgun" store, I quickly counted seven employees milling around. "Oh brother," I thought, "this place already has more help than they need." However, I smiled when introduced and did my best to sell myself. After three interviews with the owner, "Mr. C.," I became one of 21 other employees at this little jewelry store.

Mr. C. was a great salesman. He just had the personality that made people feel good, and I hope I learned something from him when it comes to treating people like they matter.

There was also an older gentleman, "Mr. P.," who worked part-time at the store and who was quite a storyteller. He loved to tell stories of the old days and since I loved to listen, we fast became friends.

I was learning people skills from Mr. C., hearing about the old ways from Mr. P., reading about diamonds and gemstones at home and studying business at the university. Also during this time, I got married and two years later had our only child, Chase.

Things were going fine until Mr. P.'s eyesight began to fail, and then Mr. C. passed away suddenly. All at once everything changed. I ran the store for nearly a year after Mr. C's death. Then it sold, and I had to step back both in pay and in position. After that, I left the jewelry business and was out of it for the next 15 years. I had the opportunity to do several different things. Although I reached a position where I had a nice salary, a company car and numerous benefits I missed the jewelry business. So in 2003 I returned to that original little jewelry store. But you know what they say: You can't go home again. And in 2006, my wife helped me achieve a lifelong goal: to own my own store. After a full year of the ups and downs, I still love it!

Randy Martin  
Martin's Jewelry  
Ada, OK

#### WITH A BADGE THIN GRAY LINE

As an agent with the Georgia Bureau of Investigation. I spent six years at this, but the longer I stayed the less interesting it got. Many long boring hours interrupted by too few minutes of excitement. The frustration of trying to put bad guys in jail and keeping them there, using the many rules and limitations we had to operate under — it was just not my cup of tea. The tremendous challenge of operating my own business, making my own decisions, trying to make enough money each month to pay taxes, the bank, suppliers and payroll gives me all the excitement I need.

Ronald D Scott  
Scott's Jewelry  
Americus, GA

#### IN THE STALLS APPRECIATION OF BEAUTY

In a horse stable at 16. I was responsible for 11 horses — grooming, feeding, exercising, and yes, shoveling out and cleaning their stalls. I'm not sure how that prepared me for being a custom-design jeweler, except that I got used to long hours and having to shovel through a lot of stuff to appreciate a beautiful animal. My second job was as a busboy and pot washer. I hated Wednesdays because that was macaroni-and-cheese night, and those were the worst pots to wash. That job taught me that no job is beneath me. And the people that perform the menial tasks deserve a lot of respect for doing them.

Matt Meis  
Wandering Jeweler  
San Diego, CA

#### IN THE YARD GRUNT WORK

Mowing grass, gardening and shoveling snow when I was 9. Dad died when I was young, and money was tight. I found that lots of people did not like to mow grass or do the grunt work of gardening, and these were the same people that wanted the sidewalk shoveled. (I prayed for snow a lot!) I learned that if you want to succeed or have any money you had to work for it, and be good at your craft, whatever it is. Sixty-one years later I still put in a full day's work, love it, and hope to die on the job.

Thomas Rice  
The Jonathan Rice Collection  
New Hope, PA