

Ten Great Cultural Career Lies (v3)

by Stever Robbins

1. You can plan your career (or would even want to).

- That's not my experience, nor is it the experience of anyone over 35 I've talked to.
- Maybe it worked in the 1950s...
- Maybe it works in careers driven by successive degree requirements (e.g. medicine)
- We get trained to think in terms of one-step-leads-to-another by 18 years of linear schooling.
- **So:** plan less and be more. Hang out with good people doing good stuff and grab opportunity as it passes by.

2. Being the boss makes for a good life.

- Have you ever worked closely with a CEO? It can be a great job, but it can also suck. Like any job, it requires a certain temperament and set of skills.
- **So:** find jobs that suit your skills and temperament, don't assume that the "ooh! isn't that amazing" jobs will be good for you.

3. "Self-made" people exist.

- The most self-made person alive still relied on millions of others to provide financial markets, schools, sewers, and the infrastructure that allowed them to go off and become "self-made."
- **So:** Recognize interdependency and build your life around positive interdependency. And when you want to learn to emulate a "self-made" person, pay attention to all the ways they *weren't* self-made; *that's* where the learning is. (And by the way, they may not be helpful in pointing out ways that contradict their myth.)

4. Hard work and skill will be appropriately rewarded.

- Bear Sterns CEO cashed out for "only" \$60 million. Cleaning lady @ \$8/hour must work two jobs just to pay rent and still doesn't make enough to save anything. 'Nuff said.
- **So:** understand what *is* rewarded (by money, power, respect, affection, time off, flexibility, freedom) and do that. If you want money, finance is the surest way to get it.



www.steverrobbins.com

© 2008 Stever Robbins, Inc.

Stever Robbins, Inc.
PO Box 400158
Cambridge, MA 02140-0002
617-354-1446
stever@steverrobbins.com

Ten Great Cultural Career Lies (continued)

5. Do a good job and you'll get ahead.

- **So:** See #4. Pay special attention to what the people who will promote you want to see. Don't assume it's results.

6. I'll work now and do what I love when I've accomplished (made my first million, cured cancer, etc.).

- Management consulting firms and investment banks use this lie as a recruiting tool.
- Dangerous strategy, and I know very few who've pulled it off. If you don't do it, you're left at mid-life trapped in a career you don't like, with a non-transferable resume, and a network composed of people who are the last ones in the world who could help you do what you love. But boy, could they help you get even further in the career you despise.
- **So:** Factor in your passions and ideals from day one.

7. Intelligence matters.

- Up to a point. After that point, it can threaten people. It's only useful insofar as you have the people/political/marketing skills to get your ideas in play. Even then, unless you're perfect, you run the risk of overconfidence.
- **So:** take classes when you need them, but stop assuming more knowledge is the answer to every problem. As a Fortune 500 CEO once confided: "business really just isn't rocket science. In fact, to a smart person, it's kinda boring..."

8. Achievement matters.

- Actually not. Who you know and who thinks well of you probably matters at least as much as what you've achieved, if not more.
- **So:** don't get too caught up in building that great company, finishing that piece of art, or whatever. Yes, getting things done can be good. But if you enjoy and learn from the things that don't get done, that may be enough.



www.steverrobbins.com

© 2008 Stever Robbins, Inc.

Stever Robbins, Inc.
PO Box 400158
Cambridge, MA 02140-0002
617-354-1446
stever@steverrobbins.com

Ten Great Cultural Career Lies (continued)

9. We can control our lives.

- Sickness, death, lotteries, luck, and love all happen. My friend just moved from Washington D.C. to Las Cruces, NM, where his snuggle-bunny has a job. *That* sure wasn't planned for.
- **So:** go with the flow. Learn to accept the things you can't control. Be o.k. with that. Enjoy the process and don't sweat it if you don't reach the outcome. (That said, give it your best shot if you really want it.)

10. Success (money, power, achievement) brings happiness.

- This has been disproven by tons of research. See the books *Happy for No Reason* by Marci Shimoff, *Are You Ready to Succeed* by Srikumar Rao, or *Authentic Happiness* by Marty Seligman.
- This lie causes great unhappiness. See the decision tree on the next page.
- **So:** orient your life around happiness and look for success, not the other way around.



www.steverrobbins.com

© 2008 Stever Robbins, Inc.

Stever Robbins, Inc.
PO Box 400158
Cambridge, MA 02140-0002
617-354-1446
stever@steverrobbins.com