

[Open in app](#)[Get started](#)

You have **2** free member-only stories left this month. [Sign up for Medium and get an extra one](#)



Emma Alvarez Gibson · [Follow](#)

Sep 4, 2016 · 4 min read ★



7 Lessons From About a Million Jobs



Because almost everything is interesting, because learning is the most interesting thing of all, and because I need health insurance in order to live, I've worked a lot of different jobs, in a lot of different sectors. Some people have seen this as a liability — “Oh,” they've said, for instance, their eyebrows rising to their hairlines, “You've had a lot of jobs,” in the manner that one might say, “You've had a lot of husbands.” Other people have said, “Wow! Tell me about your experience.” Listen, if there's one thing that having had about a million jobs provides, it's experience.

Experience: that's the thing that either sinks us or makes us. And the line in between is razor thin. It comes down to two things: attitude, and a desire to be better. When I ask someone about their experiences, I'm less interested in the things that happened to them than I am in the ways they chose to react to and work with their circumstances, and in



[Open in app](#)[Get started](#)

I've been lucky enough to have had a few great mentors, and to have experienced some pretty terrible situations, in my professional life. Together, they've taught me some solid lessons. The following are ones I use for navigation.

1. **Conflicts are almost never personal.**

They feel personal. Absolutely. But they're not. What they're really about: unmet expectations, existential crises, triggers. In most situations, there's something the other person needs from you. If you can provide it, great. If you can't provide it, say so. Be calm. Be respectful. This isn't about you, this is about a stumbling block on your path to being better. Help yourself and the other person to move past it. Don't hold a grudge. This isn't about you, it's about the work. No matter what drama someone else may try to drag into a situation, make sure that, for you, it's always only ever about the work.

2. **When they *are* personal, they're still not personal.**

Maybe you've accidentally just cost the company \$9,000 more than you meant to, because of an extra zero in an order of custom-made items you placed. Maybe there's a typo on the cover of a magazine because you weren't thorough enough. Whatever the case: it's still not about you. It's about the work. Figure out how to fix your process. Tell your boss about it. Improve the work. It's about the work.

3. **Never complain.**

Complaining is the quickest way to signal to everyone that you're an amateur. If you have a serious issue that needs addressing, take it up with the right people. Then be quiet about it. Tell your friends, your mom, your dog, sure — but at work? Once it's been addressed, you're done. Door closed. Onward.

4. **Never explain.**

Explaining makes you look indecisive, weak, or just plain silly. "I'm so sorry I'm late, I fell out of bed this morning and passed out, and when I woke up I realized I was out of gas, and at the gas station an armed robber came by and took all my money, so I had to call my friend to help, and —" might be kind of cute, but for the most part, *no one*



[Open in app](#)[Get started](#)

5. Be confident.

You were hired because someone believed you could do the job. Don't send them the message that they were wrong. Ditch any fears you might have about making mistakes and just do the job. Better to be confident and bold and mess up once in awhile than to be the soul-sucking person who needs constant reassurance just to get the job done.

6. Be yourself...to a point.

Your family and friends have to love you. (If they don't, you can find ones who do.) Your colleagues do not, but they do have to be able to interact with you. Make it as pleasant for them as possible. Amp up your professionalism, play down your questionable tics. Actively decide who [your name here] is, professionally. Create your work persona so that it's something you look forward to wearing, like a jacket you wouldn't wear for a night out on the town, but would totally rock in a more buttoned-up setting. And by the way, this goes for very casual work environments as well.

7. The ground is never stable — plan accordingly.

Economies crash. Clients take the work in-house. New bosses sometimes show up and get rid of people. Stability is an illusion, and the sooner you're okay with that, the better. Stay nimble. Always know what you do best, where you're improving, and where you'll never be any good. Know how those skills (or lack thereof) translate into different organizations. Most of all, understand the value that you're bringing with you everywhere you go, and don't be coy about it. This is the work you do in the world.

It's about the work. It's about the work. It's about the work.

