

# BLUE COLLAR & Proud OF IT

10 Million Jobs Available in the Next 8 Years!

**The All-in-One Resource**

Plus the  
Fast-Track to  
**GREEN COLLAR**  
Jobs

for Finding Freedom,  
Financial Success, and  
Security Outside the Cubicle

**Joe Lamacchia**

Founder of [BlueCollarandProudofIt.com](http://BlueCollarandProudofIt.com), and Bridget Samburg

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## INTRODUCTION

**I**n case you haven't guessed from the title of this book, I am blue collar and proud if it. I love to dig in the dirt, can't sit still, and totally enjoy being outside all day long. I run a million-dollar landscaping business outside of Boston in an upscale suburb. I worked my way up the ladder; have five children, a beautiful house, and a wonderful wife; and I enjoy taking vacations with my family. I read the *Wall Street Journal* religiously and as many books as I can, and most of my TV watching consists of the National Geographic Channel and business shows.

For years I've been watching as my kids and other youngsters are told by their teachers and their guidance counselors that if they don't go to college, they won't succeed. I didn't go to college, even though my family expected me to go. Frankly, I wouldn't have made it to graduation, and I know I would have hated it. I respect college and the people who go, but for some reason, our society has a hard time accepting that college simply isn't for everyone. I love learning and I haven't stopped learning, but college isn't the only way to learn.

In July 2003, I started a website called [BlueCollarandProudofIt.com](http://BlueCollarandProudofIt.com) because I was tired of watching guidance counselors, teachers, parents, and society in general push thousands of kids out of high school and into college, while many of them went kicking and screaming. I've watched as they went off to schools with no direction and no interest. Inevitably they started feeling worse about themselves in college—all while accumulating huge amounts of debt from the loans they took out to pay for their schooling. Consider that the average cost of college in 2008, including room and board, for in-state students at a four-year state institution was \$14,203, according to the U. S. Census Bureau. And if you were headed to a private university, the average annual price tag was \$38,400. Then, just think, if you drop out, you still owe that money, plus you have to start over and figure out what you want to do. That's a lot of money, especially if you're unsure of why you're borrowing it in the first place.

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. This is why I started my website: to provide some wisdom and encouragement and to add a different voice to the chorus of people who will tell you what to do with your life. This

book persuades you to follow your own personal desires and tells you how to get the education or training *you* need, which might not be the education your parents and teachers are pushing you to get.

I've been amazed at how many people have e-mailed me from all over North America, excited to know that someone is advocating for them. I've heard from teachers who are happy to hear someone say that we should be proud of the kids who choose to make something of themselves in the trades, and I've heard from students who are afraid to tell their parents they don't want to go to college. I've heard from adults who spent years in the white-collar world only to ultimately find their passion in blue-collar work.

Blue-collar work isn't about avoiding the responsibilities that people think come only with white-collar jobs. We blue-collar workers own nice homes and run lucrative businesses. We, too, are looking to be challenged and to exceed our own expectations. We want to excel professionally. But we also love working with our hands or in nontraditional settings. How many people are sitting at a desk right now, tucked away in a cubicle, feeling boxed in and miserable, wishing they could be doing something physical instead?

Blue-collar workers are everywhere, and they are working incredibly hard to build this country, rebuild their communities, and more. We have factory workers operating equipment worth millions of dollars with technical skills that surpass the level of expertise that many people have in white-collar jobs. Why don't we take these tradespeople more seriously? It's about time we respect the skills they've acquired and the trades they are in and the work they do. We've treated many industries as if they are invisible, but we need to start paying attention to the construction industry, to automotive technicians, and to electricians, among scores of others.

I don't have anything against Shakespeare, but you don't need to get a degree in English at a four-year university if you're interested in landscape design. You don't need to be a communications major at a cost of more than \$30,000 a year if all you've ever really wanted to do is become a renovation mason. We don't all want to sit in cubicles, pushing paper, working in middle-management jobs, traveling around the country for business meetings. If that's what you want, that's fine. But if you don't want that kind of life, why go to college and prepare for it?

Wall Street jobs sound sexy and being a lawyer is impressive, but what if it's not for you? There are incredible jobs available with amazing potential, challenging opportunities, and great pay. President Barack Obama has laid out a plan to create 2.5 million new jobs by January 2011, largely through rebuilding roads and bridges and refurbishing and modernizing schools across

the country. In Los Angeles alone, a recent tax change was approved to fund a \$1.2 billion overhaul of the city's deteriorating commuter rail, Metrolink. These are all blue-collar jobs waiting to happen. What's more, the renewable or alternative energy industries are estimating the creation of anywhere from 3 to 10 million new jobs in the next ten years.

Blue-collar workers built the United States, and we continue to build and rebuild it every day. We fix it, move it, and keep it operational twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. We are the glue that holds the community together, the people you call when your car breaks, your roads are full of potholes, and your faucet is leaking.

We are America's backbone, and we are proud of it.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am an appreciative and grateful person and have many people to thank for helping me get to this place.

Thank you to Bridget Samburg for telling my story!

I want to thank my dad, who always told me to be aggressive; my son, Anthony, for helping me build my big business and my mother-in-law Sandy O'Brien, a successful law enforcement officer, who told me, "If you don't reach for the stars, you'll never grab one."

Thank you to Helene Taylor, who helped build my website.

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Thank you to John and Nick Sorrabella, two crazy, hyperactive elementary school drop-outs, who built a huge business and became millionaires, yelling and screaming and swearing all along the way. You've inspired me.

Thank you to my mentor Sal Balsamo, who always told me, "Joey, every day you get out of bed is a gamble. You might as well go for it."

Thank you to Richard Wright, at RTN Federal Credit Union, who trusted me all the way. To Stan Davis, for believing in me for twenty years. And thank you to Barry Steinberg, who gave me lots of his time and ideas for *Blue Collar and Proud of It* from the beginning.

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And most of all, I want to thank my wife, Dawn, for helping me be a better person. Thank you, for my life.

Thank you to John Pouliot for his research and hard work and helping to compile the guide to postsecondary training in apprenticeship.

## Chapter 1

### Success Outside the Cubicle

**I**magine not being able to find a plumber to install your new dishwasher or a car mechanic to fix your broken carburetor. What if there weren't enough welders to repair our nation's crumbling bridges? What if we woke up one day and discovered that we hadn't been training enough people in the younger generation for positions in the automotive, carpentry, manufacturing, or steel industries?

We don't have to imagine any longer. While we're not about to run out of plumbers yet, and while we still have electricians to call and construction workers to hire to build our new skyscrapers, we in the United States are running low on trained, skilled workers. Meanwhile, we're pushing more kids into college, telling them it's the only way to be successful and make a life for themselves. While they are racking up massive college loans, our skilled workforce is suffering. There aren't enough trained welders or linemen or rail conductors, but we have kids in college who are miserable, who never wanted to go, and who ultimately end up dropping out.

What if we rethought the whole equation and encouraged some of these students—especially the ones who simply aren't cut out for four years of college—to go into the blue-collar workforce? What if we told high schoolers in the United States about the possibilities that exist in the blue-collar world, about the money that could be made and the exciting businesses that blue-collar workers own and run?

Baby boomers are retiring fast, and we aren't training enough youth to take over their jobs. We should be teaching students about the trades in high school, if not earlier. We should be opening doors along these other avenues, rather than only showing them the door to college. We should be telling students that unions offer incredible apprenticeships and training programs, not to mention benefits, in almost every skilled trade. By doing so, we'd not only be benefiting society but we'd also be giving hope and motivation to many young people.

## **The Blue-Collar Route: A Great Time to Start**

This is a great time to be thinking about going blue collar. There are 309 million people in the United States right now; that's a lot of houses to build and keep in good repair and a lot of services to provide. The Bureau of Labor Statistics has estimated that between 2004 and 2014 there will be 40 million job openings for workers who are entering the workforce without a bachelor's degree.\* This is more than twice the number of jobs for people who will be graduating from four-year colleges and universities.

In Canada, 48 percent of the workforce will be between the ages of forty-five and sixty-four by 2015. Nearly 3.8 million Canadians work in five skilled trade industries, but those who are retiring aren't being adequately replaced. Only 32 percent of students ages thirteen to eighteen say they would consider a career in the skilled trades.

The Canadian Council on Learning has issued reports that signal significant workforce shortages because of the rising age of workers and the shrinking pool of people entering the skilled trades. In 2002, 26 percent of small and medium-size businesses were already facing shortages, according to the Canadian Federation of Independent Businesses. Of those companies surveyed, 64 percent said they are having difficulty finding workers because of a lack of skilled applicants.

The United States and Canada are looking closely at renewable energy options, and at ways to reduce the carbon footprint and improve the environment. Gas-guzzling cars and wasteful consumption are driving all sectors to make serious changes to improve the environment and curb destructive consuming practices. Previously, only environmentalists cared about this issue. Now politicians, private-sector companies, and all citizens are considering it. All of this talk is already resulting in significant measures, such as building solar and wind power capabilities, that in turn create job opportunities. For the first time since the 1970s, plans are in the works for the construction of various nuclear power plants around the United States—another significant source of blue-collar jobs.

Statistics provided from 2006-2008 data. Due to economic conditions, these numbers are subject to change.

Pipelines that bring water to our homes and schools and businesses all across North America are bursting. They are in desperate need of repair. We have refineries to build and coal to extract from the earth. Green-collar jobs,

discussed later in this book, are cropping up everywhere as well, available in almost every industry and all parts of the country. You could be part of this next wave.

As one example of massive workforce shortages in the United States, the American Welding Society says the country could potentially face a shortage of nearly 200,000 skilled welders by 2010. The roads, bridges, and tunnels in the United States are in the worst condition ever. The infrastructure is in disarray, and there aren't enough people to do the necessary repairs. We are headed for a major revolution in terms of alternative energy and increased energy demand, but we don't have the people to build the power plants and erect the wind turbines.

"Everything is geared toward college, and in five to ten years we won't have anyone to fill these jobs," says David Marland, the training coordinator at Local 51, the plumbing and pipefitting union in Providence, Rhode Island. "These skills and trades are for life. You can always make a living." Yet Marland has a hard time even filling his apprenticeships.

These shortages are occurring for many reasons. Clearly we haven't interested enough people in the trades. "The work ethic has changed," says Jim Geisinger, president of the Northwest Forestry Association. "Kids want to sit in front of a computer." Geisinger has watched as the younger generations have left their traditional logging communities in droves. Many have moved to urban areas in search of white-collar work.

"When you talk to manufacturers across the country, the issue of skills shortages is a primary concern for all, no matter what region of Canada they are in," said Perrin Beatty, president and CEO of Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters. The gaps between jobs and the skills of the incoming workforce are being noticed. Canada's government is working to address the problem as well. "The government of Canada recognizes more and more that Canada's growth is dependent upon people entering the skilled trades—from welders and carpenters to hairstylists and chefs," said Diane Finley, minister of Human Resources and Social Development.

"The whole work world has changed dramatically," says Jan Bray, executive director of the Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE), a national organization that works to improve technical education and better prepare youth for careers in the trades. "Our society doesn't value people who work with their hands." Bray says parents are often guilty of trying to dissuade their own children from going into the trades. "But when parents hear that you need to have a high level of math to be an auto mechanic, their perceptions start to change. You

change perceptions with information.” People do start to pay attention once you tell them that they need a good brain and sufficient training to do much of the available blue-collar work. Suddenly family members listen more carefully when you talk about the trades. How do we change the perceptions that have tainted almost all of these blue-collar sectors? We need to give people more information.

The entire workforce in the United States has been projected to increase by 12.8 million people between 2006 and 2016, according to the federal government. Total employment is expected to increase by 10 percent in this same time period. Transportation, warehousing, and trucking will grow rapidly, as will jobs in the utilities. Service industries are expected to increase as well. And the occupations that include installation, maintenance, and repair will increase by 9.3 percent.

Repair work is one area of rapid change, as technological advances have become prevalent in every industry. “This isn’t about working on cars in your backyard,” says auto technician Lori Johnson. “It’s a totally different world now.” If you lift up the hood of a car, Johnson points out, you’re only going to find a few things you can touch and mess around with. Mostly, there are computerized diagnostic tests that must be run, and codes that must be downloaded and later interpreted. And you need training to do all of this.

**“If the traditional career and technical training does go away, the infrastructure of this country would fall apart. You wouldn’t have anyone to fix your plumbing or build and repair your home. Who would be the people fixing your electricity? ” electricity?**

*—Janet Bray, president of the Association for Career and Technical Education*

In the United States, much talk is taking place about nuclear power making a comeback as people turn to it as an alternative and necessary source of energy. Canada has long been more receptive to nuclear power. In the United States, though, the industry is grappling with as much as 35 percent of its workforce retiring within the next five years. The Nuclear Energy Institute predicts needing to hire as many as 25, 000 workers in that same time period. And for any new reactors that are built, the institute expects the industry to hire 1, 400 to 1, 800 construction workers, including skilled tradespeople, to complete the projects. Once built, approximately 400 to 700 employees are needed to run one of these plants, at which the median salary for an electrical

technician is \$67, 517 and a reactor operator is \$77, 782. Those are serious opportunities, and yet people haven't adjusted their expectation of these jobs. They haven't taken the time to learn about them.

"A lot of schoolteachers have no idea what an ironworker does," says Marco Frausto, the president and business agent of Ironworkers Local #416 in Los Angeles. He visits local high schools to talk with students about careers in the trades. "They're more interested once they hear how much you can make." In California, a journeyman is paid \$31.83 an hour plus extensive health and pension benefits. Apprentices with a high school diploma and no prior experience start at \$15.92 an hour plus benefits, and their wages increase 5 percent every six months. Frausto says once he actually talks about the extensive skills and training needed for welding and the techniques involved, parents are more accepting. "One does not fit all," Frausto reminds students and their parents. What works for one student won't necessarily work for another.

Wake up, Mom and Dad. Look at your child and ask, *What is good for him or her? What is going to make him or her happy and successful?* Don't think, *What college do I want to see my son or daughter in next fall?* That's not going to help. If you push what you want and your child really shouldn't be going to college, you're going to end up with one very unhappy, potentially debt-laden person. Financially, your son or daughter could be saving for his or her first house rather than paying off student loans.

Before the economy became so unpredictable in 2008, U.S. trucking companies were unable to find enough truckers and predicted that by 2014 the industry would be short nearly 110, 000 drivers. Because of the increasing cost of fuel (which has slowed the trucking industry), the railroad industry is positively booming. Freight trains are moving more cargo than ever before. In 2002, the major railroads laid off about 4, 700 workers. In 2006, they rehired 5, 000. In 2008, the rail companies were planning to build an additional \$10 billion in tracks. And according to the Transportation Department, freight tonnage is expected to increase by close to 90 percent by 2035. Where am I going with this? All of this activity means more jobs in the transportation sector and a possible shortage of jobs if we don't have well-trained individuals ready to join these industries.

People love to say that nothing is made in America anymore. But more is produced in the United States than ever before, the top-three products being food, computers and electronics, and motor vehicles. As of 2005, the manufacturing industry was producing close to \$1.5 trillion in goods, and the United States exported more than \$1.023 trillion as compared to the \$612.1

billion in goods exported in 1996. That amount has practically doubled in less than ten years. And while the auto industry has suffered tremendously, especially in Michigan, new factories are being built in the southern states. For example, Volkswagen is building a \$1 billion manufacturing plant in Chattanooga, Tennessee, which is expected to be operational in 2011.

## **Did You KNOW?**

The oil and gas industry in Canada is booming. The demand for crude oil and natural gas has risen steadily over the past twenty years, and most of it is exported. Companies are expanding, and the industry is always in need of new employees.

In Canada, the manufacturing sector employs more than 2.3 million people, or nearly 15 percent of the working population. Combined, the manufacturing, construction, automotive, and mining sectors produce half of Canada's GDP, or more than \$550 billion in services. As in the United States, manufacturing and production are traditionally sources of significant employment in Canada.

Manufacturing jobs are changing, though, and many require more interpersonal and technical skills than before. Finding adequately trained and highly skilled employees is becoming increasingly difficult for the industry. Companies are constantly looking for employees who are more skilled and can perform in a more sophisticated work environment. The factories don't resemble those of yesteryear. The dark, dingy, dirty image that many people have in mind is no longer accurate. People can't go directly from high school into most of these jobs. It's a more sophisticated world, and with that comes a more sophisticated manufacturing industry. In a study conducted by the National Association of Manufacturing, 81 percent of companies interviewed said they faced a shortage of workers, and 90 percent said this comes from a lack of available skilled workers.

In 2006, the Ironworkers Union Local #3 in Pittsburgh was having a tough time recruiting new blood. So they launched an ad campaign with the slogan, "We don't go to the office, we build it." The national ironworkers organization has adopted the catchy slogan, and more people are paying attention, says William Ligetti, executive director of the Pittsburgh-based Ironworker Employers Association. The number of applicants to the Pittsburgh apprenticeship went up immediately. While there were once ninety applicants per year, the union now has about 200 applying each quarter. And in turn, Ligetti said, the quality of the new

hires has dramatically increased. “This is a good-paying job, ” adds Ligetti. “You can go out and say, ‘Hey, I built that, ’ and show your children.”

Another source of blue-collar jobs will come from America’s crumbling infrastructure. According to a 2006 study by the Federal Highway Administration, 24.5 percent of the country’s bridges were deemed “structurally deficient” or “functionally obsolete.” They were built shortly after World War II by blue-collar workers and were made to last about fifty years, so they’re all due for an upgrade. Who is going to do all of this work? These buildings and roads don’t grow from seeds. Someone has to physically go out there and build them. Infrastructure experts estimate that \$2.2 trillion in work will be needed over the next decade. That’s a lot of jobs. The construction of pipelines for natural gas will also create employment opportunities. As well, most cities around the country are facing leaky or corroded waste and water pipes that are in need of repair. Miles of these underground pipes are expected to cost each city several billion dollars to fix or replace.

Even the airlines are adding workers, thanks to the need for upgrading. In the summer of 2008, U.S. Airways hired one hundred mechanics in an effort to boost its performance and on-time record. The mechanics were brought in to troubleshoot, fix broken lights, and replace seats that wouldn’t recline. It may sound like a small number of jobs, but it’s just another way in which blue-collar America is both indispensable and always in demand.

## **Did You KNOW?**

Interestingly, Europeans don’t have the same attitude about the trades as do Americans and Canadians. A study published in 2004 revealed that blue-collar workers in the United Kingdom were the happiest of all workplace employees. Hairdressers, plumbers, and chefs topped the list of the professions with the most job satisfaction. “It’s a misconception that white-collar professionals have the best jobs and are therefore the happiest, ” said Chris Humphries, deputy director at City and Guilds, the accrediting group in England that conducted the study. “As our research proves,

it's often people in vocational careers that are the most content and fulfilled." We all spend a lot of time at work, sometimes more than we should, so shouldn't we be doing something that makes us happy?

The time has come to stop turning our backs on the blue-collar jobs that have built nations. It's time to pay attention to the desires and skills of each individual, and it's past time that we put pride and value back into being a plumber, a carpenter, or a mason. We as a nation must start respecting each other for how hard we work and how well we do our work rather than by the title we have or the diplomas we hang on our walls. It's time that we as parents, teachers, businesses, and communities wake up, look around, and see the immense benefits gained and contributions made by blue-collar workers.

## **Did You KNOW?**

Many teenagers don't realize that some of the jobs in the trades actually require the same kind of hand-eye coordination that is picked up from playing video games. Most heavy equipment operators use joysticklike levers to control their machines. Hand-eye coordination is important when using backhoes and in many construction jobs. Times have changed, and many blue-collar jobs involve highly technical machinery and computers rather than purely manual labor.

## **Where Did the Problem Start?**

A survey done in Canada about workforce readiness and attitudes revealed that 86 percent of students said their guidance counselors had not recommended the skilled trades as an option. Seventy-two percent of those same teens said their parents had not encouraged them to go into the blue-collar trades.

Many guidance counselors are totally overwhelmed by the sheer number of students they are expected to advise. Some are responsible for as many as 600 students and have little time to tailor their advice or suggestions. Plus, one way that high schools measure their own success is by the percentage of students who go on to college after graduation. As a result, counselors almost naturally find themselves pushing college and urging students to at least give it a try. Add to all of that the fact that more community colleges have open

enrollment, which means almost anyone can take classes, regardless of what kind of student he or she was in high school. The result? College students are taking remedial courses in basic math and literacy skills. Something is wrong with this situation.

Some counselors admit that they hesitate to suggest anything but college for their students, because they fear the wrath of parents who are determined to see their children enroll in a four-year university. Other counselors are simply so overloaded with work that they don't have time to give personalized advice to each student. A study published by North-western University surveyed eighty guidance counselors around the United States and found that most were trained to respond to post-high school plans the same way: by talking about college. The study found that counselors were trained to help better students apply to four-year colleges, but they couldn't help much with students not planning on a four-year degree. Vocational teachers and counselors are simply not being encouraged to help work-bound students plan their careers.

### **Did You KNOW?**

Even though money isn't everything, you can earn a lot in the trades. Between 1997 and 2002, real wages for white-collar workers rose 1.5 percent. But the wages of blue-collar workers increased 4.8 percent over the same time period.

This book is about putting pride, excitement, and appeal back into the blue-collar industries. And it's about showing you the many lucrative, creative, challenging, and exciting options that exist in the blue-collar workforce. It's time that we all—parents, counselors, and students—take a strong look at each of the available options. With hard work and determination, anyone can build a successful career and life, even without college. I've done it, and many people around me have done it. Look around your community or your own family, and you'll see that successful blue-collar workers are all around you.

Don't think, though, that not going to college means that your education comes to an end. James Stone III is director of the National Research Center for Career and Technical Education in Kentucky, an organization that works to improve career and technical education (CTE) opportunities around the country. CTE is what many of us once referred to as *vo-tech* or *technical school*. Stone's group also works to improve the transition from high school

to work. He says that forgoing college is one thing, but postsecondary training is rarely optional. “To compete globally we need smarter workers.” And by *smarter* Stone really means *better trained*. But Stone points out that nowadays students aren’t always exposed to the trades at an early age. And in some high schools, he says, a retiring woodworking or auto mechanic teacher is likely to be replaced by an English or math teacher. “The only way kids come to know these occupations is through television,” says Stone. The time for education about the trades needs to start well before high school graduation day.

**“People take what used to be a respectable job and disregard it.” it.**

—*Blair Glenn, California-based arborist*

## My Story

If you’re heading off to college because you feel pressured to go or you feel like you’ll never make anything of yourself if you don’t go, then you’ve come to the right place. I’m proof that you can, with a lot of hard work, have a very successful and fulfilling career without college.

I’ve been working as a landscaper for twenty-eight years in Newton, Massachusetts. I didn’t go to college. My father went to North eastern University and wore his class ring proudly every day. He worked as an executive in the finance department of a major company in the Boston area. Growing up, my two sisters and I were expected to do well in school, and college was definitely what happened after high school graduation. But I hated school. I was rebellious. I had trouble focusing and I didn’t test well. And then I started to feel stupid because I wasn’t keeping up with my friends; really, I wasn’t all that interested in doing so. Years later I found out that I actually had attention deficit disorder and some other learning disabilities. Some of us have other problems, such as dyslexia.

Years ago people like us were called brats—kids who couldn’t keep still, who were told we were fidgety or had ants in our pants. Over the years I have seen these characteristics in me, my kids, my nephew, and my friends’ kids. When you try to shape people like this, as if it’s a one-size-fits-all world, you are asking for trouble. As a society we’re all asking for trouble when we make this move. You’re going to get a reaction if you push everyone to do the same thing. Miserable, frustrated teens, being told they are not good enough, are an unpleasant, trouble-making bunch. I know, because I was one.

I'll admit that I had a bit of a bad attitude. Deep down, though, I knew that I was not a dumb person, but still I felt so lousy about myself. Then the anger started to escalate. It's a terrible cycle. You really worry that you're stupid; at least I did, and I know others who did. But I'm not stupid. I was just bored and frustrated and feeling worthless.

I barely made it out of Watertown High School with a diploma. It didn't help that my friends around me were doing okay, that my sisters were good students, and that my father wanted to know whether I was going to college or not. By ninth grade I knew I wasn't going, and when I finally told my parents my decision, I felt bad about it. But I also knew in my heart that I would be miserable if I went. On top of that, I knew it would cost my parents a ton of money that would just end up being wasted in the end.

My mother and father weren't thrilled with my decision, but they ultimately were supportive. That was 1977. When I graduated from high school, I wasn't quite sure what I wanted to do. I went to work in the Polaroid factory that was close to my hometown. It was monotonous, and I hated punching the clock and staring at the same people and sniffing the same smells every day. I needed more variety and soon landed a job working for Salvuchi Construction Company. I finally felt like I fit in. One of my first projects was helping to build Bentley College in Waltham, Massachusetts, and that's when I saw guys around me who were making great money, had cash to spend, and seemed happy.

I had grown up pretty spoiled, if not just plain lucky. I had everything I wanted, I wasn't used to going without or thinking about whether I had enough cash for dinner. But I had married very early and had a son, and I needed to support him. I wanted to give him what my parents had given me. So I spent about eighteen months working at the construction job and then went to work as a jack-of-all-trades for a local businessman, Sal Balsamo. I won't bore you with all of the details of that job—I did a little bit of everything from maintenance to errands—but I learned a lot from Sal. I didn't learn much about the trades, but I learned about life and about business. He was my first mentor, someone who inspired me to follow my dreams, take risks, and do what I wanted to do. "Every day you get out of bed is a gamble, Joey. You might as well go for it." Sal used to say that to me all the time. Now I've adopted his mantra as my own. I still repeat it a few times a week.

I knew I wanted to go for it, but it took me a while to figure out exactly what I was going after. I soon decided to start my own landscaping business. I didn't have a book to guide me and I didn't have many resources, but I decided I would figure it out as I went along. I started by going around to hair