

Odd Jobs

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SOUTHWESTERN SALESMEN—1903. The caption on this old photo reads, "Comprising three young doctors, two young lawyers, one miner, one newspaper reporter and one professional bookman."

How did you get that job?

A student in a class at a university where I was interviewing asked me that question when I described working at the Stennis Institute of Government at Mississippi State. It's a long story...

Along the way, I painted schools for the Brenham Independent School District, loaded trucks for Brenham Coca-Cola, moved to Houston and worked for Brown & Root Construction, working on high-steel jackets for off-shore oil rigs, then spent a few months taking classes at Texas A&M, where I started working at Reagan's Department Store in College Station, doing inventory, lay-away, and engraving. That spring, I worked for Phil Gramm for Congress - polling and the following summer for The Southwestern Company, selling books door-to-door in North Carolina. In the fall of 1982, jobs were scarce, but I started at Cenare' Italian Cuisine in College Station, as dishwasher and then as cook for the next three years. I graduated and spent the following summer, working cattle, moving hay, and fencing at the K-K Longhorn Ranch in Buffalo, Texas. After my first year of graduate school, I spent the summer waiting tables at the Holiday Inn and shucking oysters and cooking at Gigi's Oyster Bar in Nacogdoches, Texas. In 1991 I realized that my day job would never allow me the time to finish my dissertation, so I quit and worked part-time at Edward Blank Telemarketing in Arlington, and temping at Trammel Crow Residential in Las Colinas, Texas, as well as doing some consulting for the Grapevine-Collierville Independent School District. I left Dallas to take a job at Auburn University, where I taught for two years on a visiting appointment, then began an eight year career in state government, first in Tennessee, then in Texas. I got a job at Mississippi State University where I sat on 15 doctoral dissertation committees. Since then, I've worked on state integrity investigations for a media consortium dealing with transparency, reviewed journal articles, did some volunteer work as I made my way.

And I read a lot.

I guess that's how you get this job.