

- [Jake Lang - Class of 2009](#)



My job is one you've probably never heard of. I work as a wildland firefighter for the U.S. Forest Service, on a 20 person crew called the Wyoming Hotshots. Specifically my job is a Sawyer, which means I'm a chainsaw operator on forest fires. We're based out of Greybull, WY, but each summer during fire season we travel to wherever we are needed. This year in 2019 we fought fires in New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming, Nevada, and California. My job with them runs from the middle of May until early October each year, about 4.5 months total. During those months, however, we are working almost nonstop. When on fires, we work 16 hour shifts and sleep on the ground. Work, eat, sleep, repeat. This schedule typically lasts for 14 days straight. At that time we head back to our base in Wyoming and get 2 days off, and then go back available nationally and head out for another 14 day roll.

How did I get into this? It definitely wasn't my plan coming out of high school. In fact my goal during senior year was to become a doctor. That lasted one semester of college Chemistry which shut down that plan real quick. I then went on to get my college degree in Business Administration from UWSP (which for me turned out to be a complete waste of time and money. More on that in a minute). It was during my final semester of business school that I realized I wanted nothing to do with working in an office or doing whatever it is that 'business school people' go on to do. And it turns out that's okay! I was then 22 years old, and heard about 'Wildland Firefighters'. Sounded cool to me, and all you needed to get started were 3 basic certifications. S-130, S-190, L-180. All available at UW-Stevens Point, whether you are a student there or not. I then applied for many jobs out west, and in 2015 got hired on with the Wyoming Hotshots. In April of that year I loaded up my car and started driving west, all by myself and a bit terrified, the rest is history.

IMPORTANT: Two ideas that seem to get pushed on high schoolers are that 1) you need to go to University or else you're a loser, and 2) you need to have your life figured out now.

1) Newman has a statistic that ~97% of graduates go on to some form of post-secondary education. While that may be true, it's unfortunate that statistic gets echoed year after year. What's wrong with that 3% who join the military or work for the family business? Nothing. We all go on to college simply because that is what is expected of us to do. By high schools, by our families, by society. What isn't discussed is how we are setting the foundations of our adult lives to begin under enormous amounts of student loan debt. If your

path is to become a doctor or engineer, then absolutely you need to go to college. If you are less decided on what you want to do in life, I would argue that there are better paths for you to initially take than paying to sit in a college lecture hall learning how mitochondria is the powerhouse of the cell.

2) FACT: If you're a teenager in 2020 you're probably going to live to be over 100 years old. This pressure that you have to come up with your complete life plan right now is completely ridiculous. You've got about 5 lifetimes ahead of you, and you could completely waste the next 20+ years of your life and still crush it in anything you decide to do. My advice going out of high school is to go taste some things! Learn how to weld, go drive a semi-truck, join the Marine Corps! Ever heard of commercial diving? Yeah check that out. Or go get the basic certs and apply for jobs out west as a wildland firefighter.

Universities certainly have their purpose for many people, but there are so many more options than just that. And you can always, at any point in your life, go back to college.

As for me I'm now 29 years old, not married, and don't own a house. I love my job as a wildland firefighter and look forward to heading back to my crew every summer. My current plan is to stay in wildland fire and work my way up into leadership positions. In early 2020, I'm heading down to live on a Caribbean island for 2 months to learn kitesurfing and join the circus. No I'm not kidding! My biggest piece of advice is to always be learning new things, and never be afraid to fail. Remember, 5 lifetimes ahead of you.