

In his own words: "It's important to find a job that fits with your strengths or interests."

Jobs don't hop onto you. You're responsible for finding out what's out there. If you're really interested in particular work, leap to get into it."

Leaping is the right verb to use around David Romance, who graduated in 2000 with a psychology degree and then made a bold career jump into the high-stakes field of compensation analysis. "My work helps companies to decide how much they pay their employees," says David, who holds the title of Compensation Survey Analyst for William M. Mercer, a global consulting firm involved in human resource planning and implementation.

"My group analyzes pay schemes for a wide range of corporate jobholders — CFOs, CEOs, account executives, underwriters, accountants. Large corporations, especially high-tech firms and major financial institutions, purchase our data to help them design their own compensation packages. Basically, we demonstrate what the market is paying, which is critical information for a company if it wants to stay competitive and keep up with market trends."

The work, he admits, has no obvious correlation with his university degree, which people typically use as a stepping

stone to clinical psychology. However, his current job does dovetail with a longtime fascination with mathematics and science, which translated into skills in statistical analysis and research during his undergraduate studies. Indeed, when he quietly crashed a job fair in Toronto and spoke of his degree to a William M. Mercer representative, he was immediately urged to check out the compensation field. He went home, forwarded a résumé to the company and was hired in September 2000.

"The subject of compensation is like a weird mix of science and art," he says. "It's very mathematical but there's also a lot of reading between the lines, almost like you're a detective trying to figure out what the data mean. People must love the work because they tend to stay in it. They keep circulating around the few companies in this business. It's like a game of musical chairs."

David intended to be a psychologist when he enrolled at Queen's. His interpersonal skills were strong ("everyone came to me for advice") and he anticipated learning sophisticated counselling skills. By fourth year, however, the shine had worn off his chosen profession. "I expected psychology to be more advanced and clear-cut, along the lines of medicine. Instead, there appear to be five different theories on every topic and few unified approaches. I couldn't see myself doing the work."

When post-graduation panic about finding work set in, he hit the Toronto job market. “When I started my job search, the first question I asked myself was ‘What companies are doing work that interests *me*?’ I narrowed the field to consulting, and then I researched those kinds of jobs, which took me on four or five different trails, including market research and underwriting. I knew that I needed to be in an area that involved analysis.”

His search targeted newspaper advertisements, information visits and university job fairs in Kingston and Toronto. Despite plenty of interviews, no job materialized right away, but he did become something of an expert in the fine art of interviewing itself.

“I became a professional interviewee,” he laughs. “I learned how to use the Internet to research companies, jobs, tips on interviewing and commonly-asked questions. I was able to fight interview jitters, largely because I came in prepared. My interview skills improved greatly.

Sounding knowledgeable, confident and interested is very important. I think 75 percent of any interview is about presentation.”

By the time he attended the Toronto job fair, David had developed a good instinct for whether a job would match his interests and skills. It paid off when he landed the work in compensation analysis at Mercer, a company that he

credits with giving him a wide berth to use and explore his particular skill set.

“Although processing the data is a necessity, I’m far from being a data monkey in this job. I’m engaged with the work on many other levels. The processing and analysis are akin to detective work. The surveys can be difficult to fill out and so there can be problems with the data that I need to identify. I also work on improving questionnaire design and smoothing out survey processing, and I spend a good chunk of time building relationships with clients, troubleshooting their needs and providing feedback.”

Finding himself in corporate Canada still comes as something of a surprise. His father was a businessman, but he didn’t

give David a “warm, fuzzy feeling” about his work world. But David applauds Mercer for giving him the chance to run with new ideas and to build his business acumen. In the end, he believes it was a wise move to find a career that suits his interests rather than one that suits his degree.

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“People shouldn’t fall into the trap of thinking that a Psychology degree equals a Psychology career. Think about it. Literally thousands of students graduate with psychology degrees every year, yet there are very few psychologists out there. All those grads end up with jobs; they don’t just disappear through the cracks. The biggest problem for most people is limiting themselves to their university degree.” ❖