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### From Busboy to Wall Street

Many successful college graduates today tend to view their studies at university as simply a stepping stone for a successful career, which often overlooks the significance of those who had contributed to their blossoming careers every step of the way. However, even after Ray Leihe graduated from Haverford College almost 30 years ago, he still sends festive Christmas cards annually to the family of Michael Freeman, a former librarian at Haverford College. His annual tribute expresses his enduring gratitude for the way Freeman overlooked Ray's disadvantaged background to hire him at the Haverford library, a job that launched his advanced academic studies and ushered Ray to pursue his own individual passions in economics. Even after Freeman's untimely death over 20 years ago, he remains in touch with his wife in order to honor his former employer and mentor. Not only did Freeman's benevolence allow Ray to obtain employment at JP Morgan on Wall Street just five years after he first immigrated to the United States, but he also helped to shape Ray's values and jump-started his diverse career path.

Through his experience with Freeman, Ray began to develop his own views and definitions of success that defied the typical "journey to success" of the time. He encourages others to view "success" with an open mind: "I think there's no set formula for the so-called success. The key is how you find your own version of success and how you find your happiness" (Leihe). An increasingly selective and unreasonable college admissions system for high school students today narrows and refines modern day definitions of success, in which many see only

the top elite universities as viable stepping stones. However, according to Paul Franz, a research associate for a Stanford school-reform group, “It is what you do in college, not where you go, that matters” (qtd. in Kadvany). In fact, the data proves that your college, even a top university, does not guarantee or predict success in the future (Kadvany).

Ray Leihe first arrived in the US in search of a better education. He had arrived in November of 1989 during a grave period of history in which the country had entered both a recession and its first war with Iraq. He had previously attended a boarding school in China and left his home at just 18 with only a couple hundred of dollars weighing in his pockets. Struggling to financially provide for himself during his first years as a college student, he was forced to take on a number of jobs, including waiting tables, washing cars, selling balloons at graduation, and assisting in school computer labs. Ray reflects, “I had to take on both [a] full time college work load and also work ... between 20 to 30 hours per week. ... my life was pretty much either in the classroom, or study, or [at] work, ... just to make the ends meet” (Leihe).

Although Ray was fortunate enough to eventually obtain a larger job at the Haverford library which led him to larger career opportunities, his early struggles continue to remain true as an abundance of immigrants today struggle to find longtime, reliable jobs in their early years in the US in an attempt to strive for the “American Dream.” Many of these cases today can be attributed to the grave issue of foreign credentials not being rightly validated in US work industries, as mentioned in an article published by KPBS: “‘How do you value somebody from the University of Baghdad versus somebody from UCLA?’” (qtd. in Romero), questions Jina Krause-Vilmar, CEO of Upwardly Global, a non-profit organization that aims to help skilled immigrants obtain professional jobs in the US. Having been able to expand his experience and rise from the challenges of immigration, Ray’s current job as the leader of a platform team at

Cloudflare hopes to inspire and integrate more immigrants into the workplace, especially in the heart of Silicon Valley, a culturally diverse place at the center of technology.

However, Ray's successful career and elite JP Morgan job didn't come from nowhere. After getting hired as a library assistant and technician at the Haverford library, his connections allowed him to finish his undergraduate years as a student at the prestigious college. As a staff member, he was initially permitted to take a few part-time classes as a staff benefit. "... I got all A's in those classes, [so] then I went back to the provost and said, 'Hey, can I actually apply to be a full time student'" (Leihe)? After going through a lengthy transfer application process from his local community college and gaining full support from Michael Freeman, his boss at the library, he was admitted as a full time student. Even with his new student status, he remained an employee at the library and kept his staff member privileges at Haverford. "I was told I'm the first person in the history [of Haverford] that simultaneously holds a student I.D. and a staff I.D., so that was quite unusual" (Leihe), he chuckles, reminiscing on the unique experience.

Through his education at the liberal arts college, Ray was able to explore a wide variety of classes, including history, law, and even jazz music. "I always thought I would be studying engineering or computers, [because] that's what my parents thought I would do, [what] my relatives [thought] I would do, because they studied computer science" (Leihe). However, after developing a keen interest in economics at Haverford, he began to pave a new direction for his career that heavily contrasted his previous interests. "I wound up majoring in economics because it has the right balance of [the] quantitative aspect and the liberal arts aspect" (Leihe). As a result of his newfound interests, he began interviewing with a number of financial services companies after graduation who were recruiting economics majors. Miraculously, he got an offer from JP Morgan and began working his first post-college job at 60 Wall Street.

Despite the large salary and amount of experience he gained from his time at Wall Street, his employment came to an end after he realized the depressing and mundane nature of the environment surrounding him. “I realize that, when you pick a job, a company, and also a career, more important, you need to first prioritize what makes you happy versus what makes [the] most money” (Leihe). Through his job at Wall Street, Ray was able to witness firsthand the toxic environment and “Big Brother” culture, as he calls it, that permeated the offices of JP Morgan. Tedious and repetitive tasks were accompanied by controlling and demanding bosses that bore little respect for those that were employed. On one particular day, a colleague of Ray received harsh treatment from their boss for a harmless, minor mistake. Not being able to simply stand witness, Ray stood up for his teammate and courageously confronted his superior. He knew this was a risky move that could result in the termination of his employment. However, that week, he had already been planning to resign in order to transition to a new job offer that had recently arisen. After the events of the day, he went up to his boss during his lunch break to apologize, who sat sulking at a table by himself. “I typed out [my] resignation letter, put [it] in a sealed envelope, and then walked to my boss and said, ‘Oh, sorry, I was kind of acting too emotional. Promise this won’t happen again’” (Leihe). He followed up his apology by handing his boss the envelope which contained his letter of resignation and immediately walked away, his boss unaware of the witty play he had just carried out. Nowadays, he chuckles at the memory of seeing his boss’s face shift into one of fury and rage at the realization that he had just been fooled. “I couldn’t hold my laugh, and of course, once he saw it, he was furious... his face was red” (Leihe).

Today, Ray continues to advance his diversifying career in multiple domains, and doesn’t plan on stopping anytime soon. “I still keep it with a very open mind. Let the serendipity just hit

me” (Leihe). As he expands his network of connections over time, he is met with an abundance of opportunities for new projects with growing startup companies in the bustling tech industry of Silicon Valley, where he resides today. Nowadays, he values being able to grow a team of talented individuals and forging strong relationships. He finds joy through watching those individuals move up in their own career and responsibilities. “I think [a] lifelong relationship is probably the one I treasure the most.... since you will spend half your life with the people [who] surround you, you really need to be comfortable with the type of people you will be working with” (Leihe). He hopes to continue leaving a positive impact on his coworkers and those around him in the workplace, as well as a legacy that inspires his colleagues to continue bettering themselves.

According to Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg, “[it’s] better to think of careers as a jungle gym than as a ladder — there are various ways to get to the top, and some of them involve descending or hitting a dead end” (qtd. in Abadi). Nowadays, many people are beginning to stray from the idea of a linear career ladder as the singular way to rise through your career. Ray brings these novel ideas of success to fruition by advising young workers that “.. the so-called career ladder is less about competition with other people, your colleagues, etc. It's more about [how] you compete with yourself” (Leihe). He hopes to help those around him discover their own, individual career paths just as he did many years ago by sharing avant-garde ideas of success. In place of leaving behind a grand vision and legacy, Ray strives to influence each individual person he meets and focuses on the small favors that he can do for others. “That's how I define and see success—it's about how many people you are able to influence versus sort of more individual-centric, in terms of my own success” (Leihe). Ray’s humble, down-to-earth

beginnings usher him to advocate the prioritization of your own happiness rather than the standards of our society in order to reach your highest potential.

“I think that's the ultimate. If you're happy, that's the ultimate success” (Leihe).

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