Shake up your life
How to manage your time
Personalized networking strategies

SNIFFING OUT DANGER

Joshua Vazquez, BSCJA ‘11
Explosives Detection Canine Handler,
Department of Homeland Security
New York City

Scooby
Explosives Detection Canine

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21  University Marketplace
41  Congratulations, graduates!
42  Social media
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44  Alumni Mentor Program

On the cover:
Joshua Vazquez, BSCJA ’11
See story, pg. 22
A conversation with Tim Slottow, president of University of Phoenix

By Julie Wilson

Last June, Tim Slottow assumed the office of president at University of Phoenix with 30 years of distinguished experience under his belt. Find out what strikes him most about the University’s alumni and students, the surprising emotion he felt on his first day as president and what his plans are to lead the University into the future.

Phoenix Focus: University of Phoenix has more than 890,000 individuals in its alumni community. What would you like to say as you introduce yourself to them?

Tim Slottow: First, I am inspired and extremely proud of our students and graduates. They’re taking on the difficult challenge of going to school while raising a family or being part of one, working part time or full time and having countless other things that make their lives already busy.

I’ve talked to so many of our students and alumni since June, and it’s been heartening and humbling. I know it’s hard to do what they’re doing, but they’re proving that it’s possible. And it absolutely can result in improved outcomes for them, professionally and in their personal lives.

PF: Do any of these experiences stand out to you?

TS: My first day on the job I attended the Detroit Campus graduation. I have been to more than 50 commencement ceremonies (in my leadership role at another university), and I thought I had seen it all. But this one was different. It was about families bonding together to support not the youngest [member of the family] gaining independence [at graduation], rather, it was adults being cheered on by both their children and their parents for accomplishing their academic goals in order to improve the quality of life for the entire family. The process of earning a degree allows an individual to change the lives of their children and future generations. It was a very personal, spiritual and emotional experience.

PF: As you take it all in, what are you most excited about doing at the University?

TS: There are a number of things, but the most important is the opportunity to have a huge impact on our nontraditional students who otherwise might not have the chance to go to college. They are a really impressive set of individuals who need high quality, innovative, relevant and trusted degree or certificate programs that are tied directly to what employers need.

PF: How is University of Phoenix poised to meet these demands in the future?

TS: We’re nimble in ways other universities aren’t. We have the ability to innovate and quickly put improvements and enhancements into our curricula. We are able to create successful, trusted, rigorous and engaging programs based on what our students and their employers need. And we have the incredible opportunity to do this at scale. It’s both humbling and exciting.

Connect with Tim on Twitter @TimSlottow.

A closer glimpse at Tim Slottow

Prior to serving as University of Phoenix’s leader, Tim Slottow had a celebrated gymnastics career, which included attending the University of California, Berkeley, on a varsity gymnastics scholarship. In fact, training in gymnastics was his favorite part of college.

Despite his athletic endeavors, he still graduated at the top of his class with a degree in human physiology.

As an adult, he enjoyed hearing stories from his father, who was a decorated World War II veteran. His father was inspired to share his experiences after seeing the movie Saving Private Ryan.

If he had the chance to rewind time and give the 20-year-old version of himself some advice, he’d tell himself not to worry so much about the future and to enjoy and appreciate the present.
8 Tips to re-energize, refresh and restyle a stale routine

By Keridwen Cornelius

We all know the feeling: You’re reading a book, and suddenly you realize you have no idea what happened on the past two pages. We often live the same way, skimming through days in a haze of habit. Unfortunately, we can’t flip back the pages of our calendars like the pages of a book.

Spring inspires us to sweep away stale routines, rejuvenating our lives with a fresh outlook and new goals that boost our energy, uplift our mood and enrich our lives with meaning. Do you want to run a marathon? Play an instrument? Start a business? Speak another language? Plant a garden? Spend more quality time with loved ones? It doesn’t take as much time as you might think. Here are eight ways to shake up your life now:

1. Identify restlessness

“People can tell when their lives are restless, stale and unfulfilling because they feel restless, stale and unfulfilled. However, because it’s so uncomfortable to feel this way for an extended period of time, we will find a way to distract ourselves,” says Kimberly Kingsley, energy coach and author of The Energy Cure. Bad habits like overeating, excessive Facebooking, or stirring up relationship drama distract us from the restlessness that tugs at our coats like a child trying to catch our attention.

One solution is mindfulness: “paying attention on purpose to the present moment without judgment,” says Breon Michel, a corporate and community mindfulness trainer. “Mindfulness is like a defogger ... We become aware that the way we’re living our life on autopilot isn’t working for us anymore.”

2. Choose your goals

Once you decide to pursue new goals, the world is your oyster. The trouble is, it’s an intimidatingly big oyster. Should you take up Zumba or try voluntourism in Zambia? First, do nothing. “Pause, stop, reflect, introspect. Create space to simply be,” Michel says. When the waters are still, notice what rises to the top of your wishes and what sinks into the silt of low priorities. “Usually a person knows exactly what they need to do,” Kingsley says.

“Life energy knows what it needs to expand and communicates that through our intuition—simple gut feelings.”

Make a bucket list of things you enjoy or want to try, prioritizing those you’d like to pursue now versus later. Consider each facet of your life, says Michel—social, health, career—and ask, “Am I happy with this part of my life? If not, what do I want to change? What’s my vision for making that part of my life more fulfilling?”

3. Take risks

In 2008, Kendra Beelen weighed the risks of financial instability and crazy hours against the chance to wake up each day doing something she loves. She considered the quote “If you want something you’ve never had, you have to do something you’ve never done.” She started KGB Fitness, a lifestyle fitness coaching company. Soon, she’ll take another risk: relocating from the East Coast to Los Angeles to bring community fitness to neighborhoods lacking health resources.

Talk to anyone who’s taken a risk—started a company, quit a job and moved to another country—and you’ll be hard-pressed to find a single one who regrets it. “The benefit of taking risks in life,” Beelen says, “is having a life you love living”—not to mention strengthening self-respect and confidence. Taking risks doesn’t mean recklessness, Beelen says: “I am very type A and feel my risks are mostly planned and calculated.” Nor is risk-taking a one-time shot; it’s a mindset, a daily lifestyle. “Plan each day to try something new,” Beelen advises. “Risk daily to live more fully.”
Josh Kaufman, author of *The First 20 Hours*, proved it doesn’t take long to set a goal and acquire a new skill. He learned computer programming, ukulele, yoga and windsurfing—each in just 20 hours—while working and raising a newborn with his wife. His secret? Dedicating 45 minutes every day for a month to practicing the skill. “Pick one, and only one, new skill you wish to acquire,” he advises in his book. “Put all of your spare focus and energy into acquiring that skill, and place other skills temporarily on hold.”

Don’t overwhelm yourself

Instead of waking up and instantly turning on the computer, “insert even a five-minute pause in the morning to be quiet and still and follow your breath,” Michel says. “That can really be a springboard for us for the rest of the day.” “Adopt a daily energizing ritual—something that allows you to receive energy in this world of frantic busyness,” Kingsley advises. “For me, this is meditation and yoga, for others, it may be walking, gardening, journaling, playing an instrument.”

Shake up your morning routine


Re-energize your health

At the end of each workday, identify two actions that made you feel proud, alive or happy, Michel suggests. When we see meaning in what we had considered mindless tasks, “we feel like our heart is more connected to our work. We can see it matters and feel re-energized.”

Shift your career perspective

On the other hand, if you know it’s time to move on in your career but that’s not yet financially feasible, begin researching your desired field. Find a mentor, class or volunteer program to determine if that path is right for you and what steps to take to make it your reality.

Refresh your relationships

“Relationships get stale when we perform routines without being present,” Kingsley says. “Presence brings energy into whatever we are doing, thereby nourishing the relationship.” Instead of a throwaway “How was your day?” Michel recommends occasionally devoting 30 minutes to being present and supportive with a loved one, taking turns asking questions like, “What’s working well in your life right now? What are your struggles?” Though we usually fixate on problems, faults and obligations, focusing on positives and successes does more to nourish relationships. Michel recommends “active constructive responding”—making a concerted effort to inquire about and celebrate others’ good news. Finally, she adds, “Make doing things you love just as much of a priority as everything else on your to-do list.”

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Kimberly Kingsley, energy coach and author of *The Energy Cure*

“Experiment. This is the laboratory of your life.”

Breon Michel, corporate and community mindfulness trainer
Everyone gets the same 24 hours each day. Here’s how to make them count.

By Julie Wilson

It simultaneously flies, drags and heals all wounds. Time, it seems, is either too fast, too slow or under a lot of pressure to deliver. But it’s up to us—and not the numbers on the clock—to make the most of the 24 hours we get each day.

“IT think time is one of the great equalizers of the human race,” says Daniel Brunnert who provides training and coaching at Floyd Consulting based on Matthew Kelly’s book *Off Balance: Getting Beyond the Work-Life Balance Myth to Personal and Professional Satisfaction*. Here’s how to use your time to get what you want.

**Study how you use your time**

The first step in getting a handle on your time is to look at what you’re doing with it. “Take a typical 24-hour period and, as best as you can, list out how you spend your time,” says Brunnert. “What does reality look like?” Include as much detail as possible, being honest with yourself about your productive hours and distractions.

Next, map out what your ideal day looks like. Would you knock out a big project at work, spend more time with your family or pursue a passion you’ve let slip away? After this exercise, compare the two lists, noting which actions energize you and which drain you. “We really encourage people to be mindful,” asserts Brunnert.
“People have a good idea of what their top one or two priorities are. After that it gets pretty murky pretty quick.”

Daniel Brunnert, professional trainer and coach

Set clear priorities
In planning your ideal day, you likely penciled in things that are important to you. Use this information to create a written record of what you value most in your life. “People have a good idea of what their top one or two priorities are,” explains Brunnert. “After that it gets pretty murky pretty quick.”

By devoting some of your precious waking hours to identifying what fulfills you, you’ll prepare yourself to make better decisions about how you choose to use the rest of them.

Take charge
Reflecting on how you use your time and what your priorities are can help you shift from a perspective of helplessness to one of authority. “It reminds us we are in control,” Brunnert says. “The whole ownership piece is really empowering.”

It also helps you take back time that might otherwise have been lost. For instance, if you “waste” an hour commuting each day and one of your priorities is to read more, spend your travel time listening to audio books. If you’re trying to stay fit and keep your relationships alive, you might try exercising with a friend. The point is that you can maximize these flexible moments to honor your priorities.

Brunnert finds that plugging everything into his calendar helps him find the time he needs to focus on his priorities, but that might not be the scheduling solution for everyone. “I encourage people to find what works for them,” he says.

Time to shine!

Take back your 24 hours by putting them to work for you.

Do:
Evaluate your days and weeks to get an accurate snapshot of how you are using your time.
Set your priorities so you know where to invest your time.
Schedule your activities—at least roughly—to make sure you’re devoting enough time to what matters most to you, including solo endeavors that feed your soul.
Reflect on your progress and make any necessary adjustments to your calendar or goals.

Don’t:
Forget why you embarked on this exercise in the first place. Finding fulfillment is a work in progress, so be patient with yourself.

Beware the technology time warp
While technology can be our friend, it also can be a time-sucking distraction. Quickly checking the score of the game or your email can turn into an hour of wandering around cyberspace. If you do want to peruse the Internet without losing sight of your priorities, schedule time for that, too. Set a limit for yourself, and when the time is up, get back to the task at hand so what you value doesn’t suffer for it.

Don’t forget leisure
When we have competing priorities and commitments, it’s easy to take time away from your personal pursuits to make up any deficits. But Brunnert cautions against giving up everything you enjoy. He’s a firm believer that focusing on what energizes you will enrich your life.

“If we don’t, we have less to give professionally,” he insists. “We have less energy to give to our families, to our primary relationships, to our kids. We have less to give to community organizations. We wind up doing a disservice to those around us.”

Track your progress
As you practice being mindful about how well you are using your time in accordance with your goals, it’s important to check in with yourself regularly. “At the end of the week, can [you] look back and say that you honored your priorities, that you had them show up in your life?” Brunnert asks.

If not, it’s time to take a closer look. “If we identify something that is a big priority but we don’t make any progress, it’s time to try a different approach,” he notes. After all, it’s a work in progress.

In the end, Brunnert says, “The idea is that we are trying to build a life that’s satisfying. "When we take ownership of our time, it puts us in a more positive, proactive and hopeful mindset.”

And that’s time well spent.
The word “networking” conjures up an array of emotions in people—from zealous anticipation to downright dread.

By Julie Wilson

Marty Nemko, career coach, author and regular contributor to Time.com and PsychologyToday.com, explains why reactions to this staple of career management vary so widely: “People who are introverts draw their energy from within themselves, and extroverts get energy from other people.”

That means some of us feel depleted by the kind of interaction networking requires while others thrive in its midst. Whichever way you lean, you can make the most of it while staying true to your personal style.

Calling all extroverts

If you’re an extrovert, networking is like hitting the jackpot because you are working within your element.

“You are meant for this world,” Nemko says of the social nature of networking events. “Extroverts have a natural proclivity to be good at it.”

He advises you to maximize the benefits of networking by focusing on volume. “Get to as many events as possible where the people most likely to help you are likely to be present in quantity.”

Identify opportunities to mingle with your intended contacts, such as conferences, conventions and classes. Since extroverts are energized by social interaction, Nemko suggests you “come a little early and stay a little late” so you can have as much face time as possible with others at these events.

It’s important to be careful not to be seen as self-serving, though, while shaking hands and handing out business cards. Joe Sweeney, executive coach, speaker and author of The New York Times best-seller Networking Is a Contact Sport, has advice for all networkers, regardless of their natural inclinations.

Make connections while staying true to yourself.

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“You are meant for this world. Extroverts have a natural proclivity to be good at it.”

Marty Nemko, career coach

He explains, “Really great networking is an opportunity to give and serve and not get.”

Nemko agrees. “You can’t just talk about yourself or you’ll be seen as narcissistic, someone who is only interested in getting for himself,” he says. “You can’t do that. It’s socially unacceptable.”

Instead, focus on connecting people with each other so your new contacts will remember you for the right reasons and associate you with something positive.

And for the introverts in the room

Introverts can be as effective at networking as their extrovert counterparts. It just might take a little more effort. “The key difference is that introverts have to work harder to get outside their comfort zone,” explains Sweeney.

His service-based networking approach that helps extroverts exude sincerity benefits introverts, too, by helping take the spotlight off themselves. “If you can reframe a networking event as a place where you go to give and serve, you will lose the pit in your stomach,” he says.

How? He recommends pretending you’re the host of the gathering, which turns your focus on introducing people to each other. “You start connecting people and all of a sudden, networking becomes fun,” he says.

This tactic relies on something many introverts are naturally good at: listening. If you’re uncomfortable with the idea of chatting about yourself with strangers, “ask questions instead of having to be the talkers,” suggests Nemko. “Look for the opportunity to be a good listener—offer advice and help [someone] with a problem to take the attention off yourself.”

Since you may find social events draining, Nemko advises you to do the opposite of what extroverts do. Instead of spending as much time there as possible, “come late and leave early,” he says. “Make an appearance.” Knowing you have your departure planned helps take some of the pressure off so you can use your energy making connections, instead.

But if the thought of another face-to-face event is too much to bear, you can thank technology for giving you other options. Online networking is a legitimate and efficient way to connect with other professionals. It can be as simple as sending an email to your contacts, congratulating them on an award or letting them know you enjoyed an article they published.

You also can participate in forums on professional networking sites like LinkedIn® or through a blog of your own. Posting insightful comments on articles and within discussions can help get your name out there and boost your credibility.

“The larger way to network online is through forums and the smaller way is through email exchange,” says Nemko. The best part for many introverts? It can all be done without leaving your home or office.

In the end, networking is all about the mutually beneficial connections you make, regardless of whether you fall into the introvert or extrovert camp. Says Sweeney, “The whole purpose of networking is really to magnify those human relationships.”

Hey graduates!

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Editor’s note: For more information on networking resources, visit alumni.phoenix.edu/career-resources.html; for the Alumni Chapters, visit alumni.phoenix.edu/get-involved/chapters.html
The one resource you need for your career path.

By Julie Wilson

Where are you in your career journey? Whether you’re in the mailroom, an executive office or somewhere in between, the University’s Phoenix Career Guidance System™ is an online resource that can help you reach your professional goals.

A personalized approach to career management

Last October, University of Phoenix launched an improved Phoenix Career Guidance System, adding robust online resources to further support alumni and students at every stage of their career journeys. This integrated system brings the University’s wide range of career tools and resources together in one hub, offering customized career management experience for those who use it.

“If you’re looking to get started in your career, take the next step in your current field or find a new profession to pursue, the Phoenix Career Guidance System offers you many valuable tools to help you be successful,” says Josh Duffy, senior manager of the alumni website.

Career support tailored for you

The Phoenix Career Guidance System tailors career support around each user’s individual education, goals and career situation. Upon first visit to careers.phoenix.edu/alumni, alumni will be asked to fill out a simple four-question form to gauge where they are in his or her careers and where they would like to go. After filling out the questionnaire, when the alumnus logs on to the system in the future, he or she will see a custom dashboard of career tools and resources refined to serve specific needs.

“The more information you enter into the Phoenix Career Guidance System’s tools and features, the more intuitive it becomes,” explains Duffy.
The Phoenix Career Guidance System’s offerings include 10 career-focused milestones to help keep alumni and students on track with their goals. Sub-steps break these larger milestones into manageable pieces, and can be used sequentially or users can jump to areas they most want help with. “It’s designed so you can work at your own pace,” Duffy notes.

The milestones walk alumni and students through key areas of career management to ensure he or she thinks through every detail of the process and are well prepared to meet any career opportunities that may come their way. Milestones cover the following areas:

- **Career Exploration** Research industries, fields, salary ranges and locations.
- **Skill Development** Identify areas where you could boost your skills.
- **Resumé Writing** Create an eye-catching overview of what you offer employers.
- **Professional Image** Put your best face forward, virtually and in person.
- **Networking** Cultivate a strong professional circle.
- **Cover Letter** Get your resumé noticed in the stack.
- **Interviewing** Sell yourself in person.
- **Job Search Strategy** Stay organized and plan your search.
- **Search and Apply** Find a position that’s a great match for your skills and dreams, including those posted by University partners, many of whom are specifically looking to hire University of Phoenix alumni.
- **Career Advancement** Figure out how to get ahead.

In addition to working through these milestones, alumni and students can access supplemental tools at any time for help with career exploration, skill boosting, resumé building, interview preparation and job searches. Members of the military community will find additional tools designed for their unique needs on the University’s military hub at careers.phoenix.edu/military.

The Phoenix Career Guidance System™ by the numbers

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University of Phoenix Alumni shopped more often at these Marketplace retailers in 2014:
SNIFFING OUT DANGER

Alumnus Joshua Vazquez and his explosives detection canine, Scooby, work to keep travelers safe at one of the nation’s busiest airports.

One wrong move and a hidden explosive could blow a piece of luggage sky-high at New York City’s LaGuardia Airport. It’s a risk that Joshua Vazquez faces each day in his U.S. Department of Homeland Security duties at the airport.
I went to aviation summer camps and had tons of books, videos and games all about planes, helicopters, spaceships and everything in between. The real kicker for me was being able to ride the last Concorde flight at age 11.” His mother worked as a travel agent and booked a flight on the plane that used the most powerful jet engines flying commercially. “It was cool to see the cockpit and meet the pilots,” Vazquez recalls. Ambition takes flight

Growing up in Brooklyn, Vazquez felt captivated by the airline industry. “Ever since I was a young child, I was obsessed with flight and airplanes,” he says. During his senior year of high school in 2004, he received a scholarship to an aviation program at Farmingdale State College in Long Island, New York. He landed a part-time job at a local small airport as an aircraft dispatcher during his freshman year of college and joined the Air Force ROTC program at Manhattan College. “If I obtained my aviation degree and passed the Air Force basic training, I’d be all set for my career as a professional pilot,” he says. During routine training with the ROTC cadets, Vazquez took a mandatory colorblindness test—and failed. He felt devastated to learn he had a condition that disqualified him from ever becoming a military or commercial pilot. “It was crushing,” he recalls. “I thought, ‘Now what? What do I do now?’ I was only 18 years old, and I lost all my drive. I didn’t want to go to school. I didn’t want to go to work. I quit the ROTC program and eventually dropped out of college.”

The road back

“At that age, I didn’t understand the significance of having a backup plan,” Vazquez recalls. Feeling lost, he became trapped in an endless loop of low-paying jobs at fast-food chains and retail stores that made it impossible to make ends meet. The turning point came in 2006, when he applied for a screener position at a local airport and landed the job. With a renewed sense of confidence and purpose, he enrolled with University of Phoenix at age 21 and earned an associate degree in criminal justice followed by a Bachelor of Science Degree in Criminal Justice Administration. The degrees were his entry into the criminal justice field, first as a corrections officer and then as an explosives detection canine handler. “Education and professional growth go hand in hand,” says Vazquez. “If I obtained my aviation degree and passed the Air Force basic training, I’d be all set for my career as a professional pilot, or so I thought,” he says.

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During routine training with the ROTC cadets, Vazquez took a mandatory colorblindness test—and failed. He felt devastated to learn he had a condition that disqualified him from ever becoming a military or commercial pilot. “It was crushing,” he recalls. “I thought, ‘Now what? What do I do now?’ I was only 18 years old, and I lost all my drive. I didn’t want to go to school. I didn’t want to go to work. I quit the ROTC program and eventually dropped out of college.”

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By Cynthia Ramnarace
Photographs by Bruce Racine

Ashley Garcia may be young, but she realizes that careful planning and doing what you love can lead to success.

When Ashley Garcia arrived at her campus as a college freshman, she was overwhelmed. Not by the classes or the curriculum, but by how impersonal her interactions were.

“The experience of trying to register and understand what was going on was really difficult,” says Garcia, 24, of Gilbert, Arizona. “No one knew who I was. I had to get a number and wait. Every time I went back to talk with someone, I had a different counselor. It was a mess. I really liked the idea of having a counselor who was going to be there for me and really understand where I’m trying to go.”
At her father’s suggestion, Garcia shunned the traditional college environment and enrolled in online courses at University of Phoenix. She pursued the dream she had since she was a child pretending to be a newscaster in front of a mirror: to become a journalist.

“The teachers were really adamant about building your own style of writing and making yourself a strong writer,” says Garcia. “My teachers had been through a lot of different journalism jobs, and they know how it is.”

They also knew who Garcia was, which made all the difference compared to her previous college experience. And then there were the learning teams, which made her feel as if she were in a class with peers who were all focused on the same goal.

Garcia, who admits to being “a little crazy” when it comes to her focus and drive, completed her bachelor’s degree in 2014.

“I definitely didn’t see sunlight for a while, but it was worth it.” She approached a local magazine and asked if she could write for them. Her initiative got her hired as an intern, a position that led to a freelance writing gig—her first being paid as a writer.

From there Garcia got a staff job at a local online technology news magazine. She learned how to turn around stories on deadline. She attended the International Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, a leading trade show notorious for making headlines with new tech product launches, as a credentialed member of the media.

“We got to interview a lot of people,” Garcia says. “It was really cool to get your name out there and be part of an actual publication consistently. I learned a lot about the industry there.”

While the work was exciting, Garcia quickly learned that the pay rates in journalism aren’t in line with her dreams. She talked with her mentors and bosses about her career choices, and it soon became clear that an MBA would allow her to continue the writing career she loves while also increasing her earning potential. Garcia researched employers and discovered that PayPal has a solid social media department, which is an area of communication that interests her. The company also offered opportunity for advancement, so she got her foot in the door by taking a job in the customer service department.

“I had a conversation with my manager as soon as I started,” Garcia says. “I told her, ‘This is where I want to go. Can you help me get there?’” As a result, Garcia is writing weekly newsletters for her team and is able to shadow the social media department to learn the ropes. She’s doing that while enrolled in the University of Phoenix MBA program. She hopes to earn her diploma in two years.

“I followed the opportunity to make more money and make more of a career out of what I was doing. I know if I work hard, I can get there.”

Ashley Garcia isn’t sure where she’ll be in five years—she won’t even be 30 yet—but she does know that as long as she is writing, she’ll be happy. “I’d like to write a book,” Garcia says. “I’d like to have my degrees under my belt and be successful. But mostly, I want to be passionate about what I’m doing. If you’re not driven to do something, if you’re not moving forward, you’re not going to be happy.”

Cynthia Ramnarace is an independent journalist based in Rockaway Beach, New York. She specializes in personal finance, health and older adult issues. Find out more at cynthiaramnarace.com.

For gainful employment information, please visit phoenix.edu/programs/gainful-employment.html.
The IT Factor

Web Operations Data Analyst Sam Hozan turns his passion and talent for high tech into a dream career.

As an 8-year-old boy living in communist Romania, Sam Hozan remembers walking to the store to buy bread and milk with his mother.

“If you got there early enough to find a loaf of bread on the shelf, you were lucky. If you didn’t get there on time, then you just went without bread that day,” he recalls.
“The government controlled everything: your water, your electricity, when it was on and when it turned off, your food supply, your education, and even whether you were allowed to advance to high school or college.”

Window of opportunities

Twenty-four years later, Hozan feels blessed to be in the United States with all of the opportunities afforded him. His mother and father fled to the U.S. with their seven children, all under the age of 9, after the Romanian Revolution in 1989 when the country was in a period of unrest. The uprising ultimately resulted in the violent overthrow and execution of the country’s longtime Communist leader, Nicolae Ceausescu, and subsequently, the end of 42 years of Communist rule in Romania.

Hozan found himself in a strange new country, with English as his second language, but he was old enough to understand that he and his family had landed in a much better place.

“Seeing my mom and dad pick up and come here with almost nothing, and with the courage to start over and make such a change in their lives had such a huge impact on me,” Hozan says. “That was always ingrained in my mind; as the head of the household, you sometimes have to make extreme sacrifices and decisions to provide for your family.”

IT street smarts

Since he had always had a propensity for math, algebra, analytics and technology, it was natural for Hozan to pursue that field of study when he graduated from high school. He took a few community college courses in information technology and landed good positions in the IT industry, first as a website marketing manager and later as a search engine optimization (SEO) specialist. Hozan willingly moved from Vancouver, Washington, to Hot Springs, Arkansas, and eventually back to Vancouver, where he currently resides, to find employment that would challenge him in the IT field.

“I realized that if I had a college degree, the pay might be much higher relative to my experience and knowledge,” he says. “I was considered ‘street smart’ in the IT industry, but not ‘book smart.’ I wanted to change that in order to better provide for my family.”

He discovered that his employer had a tuition-reimbursement program with University of Phoenix, one of its major educational partners, so he took the leap and enrolled in the University’s online Information Technology degree program. Hozan believed he had found the perfect fit, in both his higher education and employment choices.

Degree within reach

Hozan completed his associate degree and ultimately advanced to his current position as web operations data analyst with IT giant Hewlett-Packard (HP). He completed his Bachelor of Science in Information Technology degree with a concentration in web development in 2013 while working at HP.

“Eventually, I would like to take my children back to Romania to show them where their family came from and where we are today,” Hozan says. “So many times, we take for granted the freedoms we’re given here in this country—even education itself. To have this kind of freedom and opportunity and not pursue it—that, to me, is inexcusable.”

Keri Ruiz is an award-winning freelance writer and communications professional with more than 30 years’ experience in the journalism, public relations, broadcasting and marketing fields. Connect with Keri at linkedin.com/pub/keri-ruiz/4a/b05/276.

For gainful employment information, please visit phoenix.edu/programs/gainful-employment.html.
Q: How can I get experience in my chosen field while still in school?

A: While acquiring classroom skills and knowledge is critical to obtaining a career in any industry, experiential work can be just as important. For example, job seekers in the field of information systems and technology often find that along with a degree, employers are asking for a number of years of experience in the field.

There are many ways for you to gain experience while going to school. You can begin with class assignments and expand those into personal projects that will help you learn additional skills. For example, you can download programs like VirtualBox® from Oracle, a popular cross-platform virtualization software that enables you to run multiple operating systems on your Mac, PC, Linux, or Oracle® Solaris machine. Visit sites like CodeChef and Coderbyte to practice programming in different languages. You can also refine your hardware skills by building or setting up computer systems; you can purchase low-cost, outdated equipment and set up a lab where you can practice. Offer to help friends or family with their computers: Fix their email systems, create websites and provide technical information.

Next, look for opportunities to volunteer with local nonprofits. Many types of organizations need tech support, even for just a few hours per week. This will allow you to gain additional experience and use skills you have learned in the classroom. Nonprofit volunteerism also looks great on your resume. Joining local IT groups is a great way to expand your network and learn additional skills. You can find groups through Meetup®, LinkedIn®, as well as through local business journals. Internships are another great way to gain hands-on experience, although they do require a weekly time commitment, and often last three to six months. If this is not an option, post-graduation externships are generally shorter in duration and may be fewer hours per week. Many companies have structured internship programs listed on their human resources pages, and there are also listings in the Phoenix Career Guidance System™ (career.phoenix.edu/alumni). If you do not see any in your area, research local organizations (any that might need technical help) and reach out to ask about the possibility of an internship or externship.

Q: I just had a job interview; what should I do next?

A: Interviews are a crucial piece of the job search process. After an interview, there are some important next steps.

1. Send a thank-you note. Send a note to everyone who took part in the interview, and personalize each message. Email thank you notes are acceptable; written notes are a nice touch, but are not as immediate. If you do not have contact information for everyone you met with, email your main contact for their email addresses.

2. Evaluate the opportunity. Consider all aspects of the position you learned from the interview. Does the position meet your career goals? Does it fit with your educational background and experience? Do you think you would like working for this organization? These are just a few factors to consider.

3. Evaluate your performance. Think about the questions that were asked and how confident you feel about your answers. Were there any questions you could not answer or struggled with? Reviewing your responses will help you prepare for a second interview or interviews with other organizations.

4. Follow up. In some cases, the employer will tell you the timeline for second interviews or decisions during the initial meeting. If they do not provide that information, inquire about it. It’s also a good idea to reach out after one to two weeks to check the status of your application.

5. Decline if you’re not interested. If you evaluate the opportunity and decide the position is not a good fit, it is your responsibility to contact the employer to respectfully withdraw your application.

6. Until you have received and accepted an offer, you’ll want to continue your search. Once you accept an offer, it is time to stop looking and decline any further interview offers you may receive.

By Kathryn Scahill, NCC, DCC
“We Get It” campaign launches

The University’s new ad campaign, “We Get It,” maintains its focus on this core message, which has been at the heart of its campaigns in recent years—and at the heart of its vision since its founding in 1976.

“The new ads continue to talk about our understanding of the adult learner,” says Les Lifter, senior vice president of marketing for University of Phoenix. “There isn’t another educational institution that has the kind of insight and keen awareness of what it takes for our students to be successful.”

On the air
Four new “We Get It” commercials launched in January, hitting the airways with messages about the University’s unique offerings for its students. The first spot, “We’ve Noticed,” features information about the risk-free trial period that is available to new students.

“This takes some of the uncertainty out of the decision by allowing prospective students to check us out for three weeks to make sure University of Phoenix is the right fit for them,” says Lifter. “It’s a no-obligation look.”

The second commercial, “Hard Work,” highlights how the University awards course credit to students for a wide range of previous education and experience, which are evaluated on their relevance to a student’s degree program.

“In Determination,” the University shows the positive impact higher education can have on the entire family through the eyes of daughters observing their mother’s tireless commitment to her studies. The University recognizes the determination students possess to work hard to earn their degrees, so it builds an education to meet students’ needs.

The final spot, “Good Days,” illustrates the University’s efforts around providing the education students need for the careers they desire. “Regardless of which college or school you enroll in at University of Phoenix, you’ll have a curriculum that’s aligned with the related industry,” Lifter stresses. “What that means is you’ll have the confidence that what you’re learning can help you as you work toward the career you want.”

One thing all the new advertisements share is the story they tell about the University’s students. “The student is at the center. It’s all about them,” says Lifter. “We’re working to communicate the impact an education can have, not just on the students but on their entire families as well.”

University of Phoenix® understands the specific challenges adult learners face and has for nearly 40 years. That’s why it has designed an education for adult learners.

The University awards course credit to students for a wide range of previous education and experience, which are evaluated on their relevance to a student’s degree program.

By Julie Wilson

University of Phoenix continues to tell its story in new commercial spots and ads.

Les Lifter, senior vice president of marketing for University of Phoenix.

How has education impacted your life? Has it boosted your career? Has it motivated your family members to reach their own academic goals? Share your unique journey and success story with us at alumni@phoenix.edu.

Do you have an inspiring story?

Les Lifter, senior vice president of marketing for University of Phoenix.
Mentors and mentees match up for inspiration and motivation

As a graduate, your expertise can help motivate and personally guide current students through their University of Phoenix® journeys while helping round out the students’ professional viewpoints.

“It’s a way for our alumni to give back because their experience at University of Phoenix has helped open doors for them,” says Dana Anthony, manager of the Alumni Mentor Program. “The alumni mentors are devoted to helping students gain confidence, momentum, clarity and vision for their futures.”

Matching mentors with mentees

Recently revamped, the mentor program operates much like online dating sites: via an electronic matching algorithm. Mentors and mentees who have been approved to join the program fill out profiles and answer a simple set of four questions. The profile information and answers to the questions are then matched between the two groups to find optimal pairings. Mentees receive a list of recommended mentors who may be able to provide knowledge and motivation in the fields the mentee seeks assistance in. But mentees are highly encouraged to refine the list proactively to make the best match. The program works best when mentors and mentees are highly dedicated to success and working together.

Once a match is made, the mentor and mentee agree on how to communicate with one another—by phone, email, Skype®, or in some cases, in person—and how often they will connect. They’ll discuss mentorship goals and potential outcomes via their plan, which may include gaining career insight, learning more about their mentor’s industry and having someone to exchange ideas with.

Mentor advantages

For alumni, mentoring is an excellent way to develop and deepen their coaching, communication and leadership skills. Becoming a mentor not only gives alumni the chance to share vital information and inspire students, but also provides an opportunity to “pay it forward to help students stay focused on their education and help support them,” Anthony says.

Mentee advantages

For mentees, the one-to-one guidance provides the invaluable perspective of seasoned professionals who have used their University of Phoenix education.

Alumni mentors may opt to share stories about how they attained their current positions and what it took to get there; discuss their organizations’ culture; suggest industry resources, including relevant books, websites and podcasts; and offer ideas about how to answer potential industry-specific questions that might be asked during job interviews.

Forums: Ask the community-at-large

For students who aren’t seeking a one-to-one experience, the program also offers online forums where you can post questions to be answered by the mentor/mentee community-at-large.

Flash mentoring—when you need answers fast

The revamped mentor program also includes a “flash mentoring” option for students who want to connect with a mentor via a mobile device for a one-time consult. For example, “If a student has a job interview at Bank of America the next day, he or she can reach out to someone in the banking industry to ask them a quick question,” Anthony says.

Preparing mentors to succeed

Mentors receive training through an online handbook that includes an overview of the program and the do’s and don’ts of mentorship, as well as extended training and professional development opportunities. The handbook gives mentors a better idea about their roles and helps them set appropriate boundaries, explains Anthony. The mentors also receive information about University of Phoenix career resources, which they may refer mentees to for career counseling outside the mentor’s purview, including resume review, career best practices and job placement.

Requirements for applying to become a mentor include a bachelor’s degree, a valid individual record number (IRN) and a current LinkedIn® profile.

For more information about becoming a mentor or mentee, visit alumni.phoenix.edu/get-involved/mentor-program.html.
Alumni Chapter spotlight

Washington, D.C. Alumni Chapter focuses on giving back
It may be called the Washington, D.C., Alumni Chapter, but chapter members want you to know it’s open to anyone living in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area.

Founded February 28, 2013, the vision for the chapter is to pay it forward and give back to the community. “One of the things we wanted to do was adopt a charity and one of us had to have sweat equity in that particular charity,” says Clara Lee, DM ’11, president of the chapter. The chapter elected to support Thrive DC, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to prevent and end homelessness. “It is important to us that we give back to the community,” says Lee, “That is why at all of our events, we collect donations for Thrive DC,” she adds.

The chapter, which has 144 members, holds various networking and professional development events quarterly. “We want to impress upon the students that they can be a part of the chapter and network,” she notes.

Follow the Washington, D.C., Alumni Chapter on Facebook or email uopwashingtondcchapter@gmail.com to learn more.

Seattle Alumni Chapter keeps the pulse on networking.
The coastal seaport city of Seattle has an active alumni chapter of 125 members. If you aren’t connected with this group, you’re missing out on monthly career-related seminars, and opportunities to networking and connect with fellow graduates.

“Every other Saturday at the [Seattle] campus we hold events. We get from 12 to 20 people attending,” says Will Wild, president of the Seattle Alumni Chapter. The chapter leadership lines up speakers for the events and this next year they are considering themed events that focus on various career fields. Connecting with nearby chapters is also a focus for 2015, “We made connections with the Portland Alumni Chapter and next year we want to hold a joint chapter event,” adds Wild.

Furthering education across Seattle
Chapter VP of events, Chuck Davis, took the opportunity during alumni homecoming this year to enter a nomination for Nels Mize to win a Paying It Forward Scholarship. He was happy to learn that Mize won the scholarship and begins classes in the associate program on January 17 to earn a Cisco Networking certification. He has plans to continue on toward his bachelor’s degree.

Get connected! Follow the Seattle Alumni Chapter on Facebook or email uopxalumniseattle@gmail.com to learn more.

Do you know someone on this list?

Each month, approximately 8,000 dedicated students earn their degrees and become proud University of Phoenix graduates.

Phoenix Focus magazine celebrates the newest members of the growing alumni community—now more than 878,000 strong—with an online list of recent graduates.

To see the list of graduates from October 1 – December 31, 2014, visit the Phoenix Focus home page.

alumni.phoenix.edu/phoenix-focus
Get social, alumni

The UOPX Alumni Facebook is buzzing with conversations – Jump in!

Melanie Brown
Finished my Bachelor’s in Health Care Administration in June, and started my Master’s in Psychology three months ago. I love my journey and educational experience with University of Phoenix.

Richard Needham
Best decision I ever made to be a Phoenix!!! It helped me to become a plant manager and now my daughter and son are students. I couldn’t be prouder!!

Laureen Vincent
Proud Grad for 12 years now... so glad to see so many following in our humble footsteps! Congrats to all those still searching while holding down a job, family and life!!

Paula Fay Singleton
Just finished in August with associate degree, now working on my bachelor’s. Loving the [University of] Phoenix way.

Carolyn Balogue
Class of 2009. Best decision I’ve ever made. I have the best career I could ask for thanks to my BSM.

Carol M. Bristol
Not only fellow alumni, but good friends. Puerto Rico Campus!

Beth Ann Howard
Currently working on degree #2

Tina Gagnon
Keep the big picture always in your mind, and know that this is something for your greater good. Also stay humble with your accomplishments; not that you should not be proud of what you accomplish, but just think of it as a checklist to the end result.

Daffne Brigitte Ruglas
Have goals for yourself, and never give up regardless of how hard it might be.

Barbara Bishop
I remind myself of why I started and what the outcome will be. It works every time for me!

Leah Watters
I think about the outcome, what I want out of life, my career passion, and the only way I can get there is with an education. I love the sound of “Dr.” Watters.

Joey Weibel
Only 3 more days until I’m done with my Bachelor degree in Project Management! University of Phoenix Alumni Association

Lori DeGraw
Congrats, I know you will be glad!

Christopher Ryan
Awesome stuff, Joey, really cool!

Teresa Frazier
Oh that’s cool! Way to go! I graduated from University of Phoenix, too. Great school!

Kathy S. Crawford
Congratulations!! Wahhooooo!!

Kirsten Braudt
I started working at my current job about the same time I started at UOPX. As I earned each degree (associate in psychology and bachelor’s in psychology) I would re-state my plans/goals with my boss. The response was sort of an “atta girl!” My new boss and I sat down shortly after she took the position a year ago, and I updated her on what my goals have been and where I am going. She is 100-precent thrilled and supportive in what I have done and continue to do and especially how it fits the company’s plans.

Erika Fossen
This actually worked for me. I told my boss what my short- and long-term goals were. They gave me a raise and are sending me to Germany for training.

Join the conversation
Like and follow us on:

facebook.com/uopxalumni
linkedin.com/uopxalumni
twitter.com/uopxalumni
instagram.com/uopxalumni
GET CONNECTED.

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linkd.in/uopxalumni
twitter.com/uopxalumni

Join forces:
knowledge + experience = power

Graduates, you have the power to inspire and motivate students. Your experiences and knowledge matter.

Apply to be a mentor
bit.ly/uopxmentor

The Alumni Mentor Program.