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middle class]



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Raw Energy Left Right Brain

By Daniel H. Pink

Logical
and precise
left-brain thinking
gave us the
Information Age.
Now comes the
Conceptual Age.

When I was a kid – growing up in a middle-class family, in the middle of America, in the middle of the 1970s – parents dished out a familiar plate of advice to their children: Get good grades, go to college, and pursue a profession that offers a decent standard of living and perhaps a dollop of prestige. If you were good at math and science, become a doctor. If you were better at English and history, become a lawyer. If blood gossed you out and your verbal skills needed work, become an accountant. Later, as computers appeared on desktops and CEOs on magazine covers, the youngsters who were really good at math and science chose high tech, while others flocked to business school, thinking that success was spelled MBA.

Tax attorneys. Radiologists. Financial analysts. Software engineers. Management guru Peter Drucker gave this cadre of professionals an enduring, if somewhat wonky, name: knowledge workers. These are, he wrote, “people who get paid for putting to work what one learns in school rather than for their physical strength or manual skill.” What distinguished members of this group and enabled them to reap society’s greatest rewards, was their “ability to acquire and to apply theoretical and analytic knowledge.” And any of us could join their ranks. All we had to do was study hard and play by the rules of the meritocratic regime. That was the path to professional success and personal fulfillment.

But a funny thing happened while we were pressing our noses to the grindstone: The world changed. The future no longer belongs to people who can reason with computer-like logic, speed, and precision. It belongs to a different kind of person with a different kind of mind. Today – amid the uncertainties of an economy that has tgone from boom to bust to blah – there’s a metaphor that explains what’s going on. And it’s right inside our heads.

Scientists have long known that a neurological Mason-Dixon line cleaves our brains into two regions – the left and right hemispheres. But in the last 10 years, thanks in part to advances in functional magnetic resonance imaging, researchers have begun to identify more precisely how the two sides divide responsibilities. The left hemisphere handles sequence, literalness, and analysis. The right hemisphere, meanwhile, takes care of context, emotional expression, and synthesis. Of course, the human brain, with its 100 billion cells forging 1 quadrillion connections, is breathtakingly complex. The two hemispheres work in concert, and we enlist both sides for nearly everything we do. But the structure of our brains can help explain the contours of our times.

Until recently, the abilities that led to success in school, work, and business were characteristic of the left hemisphere. They were the sorts of linear, logical, analytical talents measured by SATs and deployed by CPAs. Today, those capabilities

are still necessary. But they’re no longer sufficient. In a world upended by outsourcing, deluged with data, and choked with choices, the abilities that matter most are now closer in spirit to the specialties of the right hemisphere – artistry, empathy, seeing the big picture, and pursuing the transcendent.

Beneath the nervous clatter of our half-completed decade stirs a slow but seismic shift. The Information Age we all prepared for is ending. Rising in its place is what I call the Conceptual Age, an era in which mastery of abilities that we’ve often overlooked and undervalued marks the fault line between who gets ahead and who falls behind.

To some of you, this shift – from an economy built on the logical, sequential abilities of the Information Age to an economy built on the inventive, empathic abilities of the Conceptual Age – sounds delightful. “You had me at hello!” I can hear the painters and nurses exulting. But to others, this sounds like a crock. “Prove it!” I hear the programmers and lawyers demanding.

To convince you, I’ll explain the reasons for this shift, using the mechanistic language of cause and effect.

The effect: the scales tilting in favor of right brain-style thinking. The causes: Asia, automation, and abundance.

Asia

Few issues today spark more controversy than outsourcing. Those squadrons of white-collar workers in India, the Philippines, and China are scaring the bejesus out of software jockeys across North America and Europe. According to Forrester Research, 1 in 9 jobs in the US information technology industry will move overseas by 2010. And it’s not just tech work. Visit India’s office parks and you’ll see chartered accountants preparing American tax returns, lawyers researching American lawsuits, and radiologists reading CAT scans for US hospitals.

The reality behind the alarm is this: Outsourcing to Asia is overhyped in the short term, but underhyped in the long term. We’re not all going to lose our jobs tomorrow. (The total number of jobs lost to offshoring so far represents less than 1 percent of the US labor force.) But as the cost of communicating with the other side of the globe falls essentially to zero, as India becomes (by 2010) the country with the most English speakers in the world, and as developing nations continue to mint millions of extremely capable knowledge workers, the professional lives of people in the West will change dramatically. If number crunching, chart reading, and code writing can be done for a lot less overseas and delivered to clients instantly via fiber-optic cable, that’s where the work will go.

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left-brain work such as basic computer coding, accounting, legal research, and financial analysis is migrating across the oceans. But that’s also why plenty of opportunities remain for people and companies doing less routine work – programmers who can design entire systems, accountants who serve as life planners, and bankers expert less in the intricacies of Excel than in the art of the deal. Foreigners can do left-brain work cheaper, we in the US must do right-brain work better.

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Consider jobs in financial services. Stockbrokers who merely execute transactions are history. Online trading services and market makers do such work far more efficiently. The brokers who survived have morphed from routine order-takers to less easily replicated advisers, who can understand a client’s broader financial objectives and even the client’s emotions and dreams.

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India doesn’t swipe your accounting job, TurboTax will. Now that computers can emulate left-hemisphere skills, we’ll have to rely ever more on our right hemispheres.

Our left brains have made us rich. Powered by armies of Drucker’s knowledge workers, the information economy has produced a standard of living that would have been unfathomable in our grandparents’ youth. Their lives were defined by scarcity. Ours are shaped by abundance. Want evidence? Spend five minutes at Best Buy. Or look in your garage. Owning a car used to be a grand American aspiration. Today, there are more automobiles in the US than there are licensed drivers – which means that, on average, everybody who can drive has a car of their own. And if your garage is also piled with excess consumer goods, you’re not alone. Self-storage – a business devoted to housing our extra crap – is now a \$17 billion annual industry in the US, nearly double Hollywood’s yearly box office take.

But abundance has produced an ironic result. The Information Age has unleashed a prosperity that in turn places a premium on less rational sensibilities – beauty, spirituality, emotion. For companies and entrepreneurs, it’s no longer enough to create a product, a service, or an experience that’s reasonably priced and adequately functional. In an age of abundance, consumers demand something more. Check out your bathroom. If you’re like a few million Americans, you’ve got a Michael Graves toilet brush or a Karim Rashid trash can that you bought at Target. Try explaining a designer garbage pail to the left side of your brain! Or consider illumination. Electric lighting was rare a century ago, but now it’s commonplace. Yet in the US, candles are a \$2 billion a year business – for reasons that stretch beyond the logical need for luminosity to a prosperous country’s more inchoate desire for pleasure and transcendence.

Abundance

Liberated by this prosperity but not fulfilled by it, more people are searching for meaning. From the mainstream embrace of such once-exotic practices as yoga and meditation to the rise of spirituality in the workplace to the influence of evangelism in pop culture and politics, the quest for meaning and purpose has become an integral part of everyday life. And that will only intensify as the first children of abundance, the baby boomers, realize that they have more of their lives behind them than ahead. In both business and personal life, now that our left-brain needs have largely

been sated, our right-brain yearnings will demand to be fed.

As the forces of Asia, automation, and abundance strengthen and accelerate, the curtain is rising on a new era, the Conceptual Age. If the Industrial Age was built on people’s backs, and the Information Age on people’s left hemispheres, the Conceptual Age is being built on people’s right hemispheres. We’ve progressed from a society of farmers to a society of factory workers to a society of knowledge workers. And now we’re progressing yet again – to a society of creators and empathizers, pattern recognizers, and meaning makers.

But let me be clear: The future is not some Manichaeian landscape in which individuals are either left-brained and extinct or right-brained and ecstatic – a land in which millionaire yoga instructors drive BMWs and programmers scrub counters at Chick-fil-A. Logical, linear, analytic thinking remains indispensable. But it’s no longer enough.

To flourish in this age, we’ll need to supplement our well-developed high tech abilities with aptitudes that are “high concept” and “high touch.” High concept involves the ability to create artistic and emotional beauty, to detect patterns and opportunities, to craft a satisfying narrative, and to come up with inventions the world didn’t know it was missing. High touch involves the capacity to empathize, to understand the subtleties of human interaction, to find joy in one’s self and to elicit it in others, and to stretch beyond the quotidian in pursuit of purpose and meaning.

High concepts

Developing these high concept, high touch abilities won’t be easy for everyone. For some, the prospect seems unattainable. Fear not (or at least fear less). The sorts of abilities that now matter most are fundamentally human attributes. After all, back on the savannah, our caveperson ancestors weren’t plugging numbers into spreadsheets or debugging code. But they were telling stories, demonstrating empathy, and designing innovations. These abilities have always been part of what it means to be human. It’s just that after a few generations in the Information Age, many of our high concept, high touch muscles have atrophied. The challenge is to work them back into shape. The sorts of abilities that now matter most are fundamentally human attributes.

Want to get ahead today? Forget what your parents told you. Instead, do something foreigners can’t do cheaper. Something computers can’t.

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grow up

MEET THE TWIXTERS. THEY'RE NOT KIDS ANYMORE,
BUT THEY'RE NOT ADULTS EITHER. WHY A NEW BREED
OF YOUNG PEOPLE WON'T - OR CAN'T? - SETTLE DOWN

Michele, Ellen, Nathan, Corinne, Marcus and Jennie are friends. All of them live in Chicago. They go out three nights a week, sometimes more. Each of them has had several jobs since college; Ellen is on her 17th, counting internships, since 1996. They don't own homes. They change apartments frequently. None of them are married, none have children. All of them are from 24 to 28 years old.

Thirty years ago, people like Michele, Ellen, Nathan, Corinne, Marcus and Jennie didn't exist, statistically speaking. Back then, the median age for an American woman to get married was 21. She had her first child at 22. Now it all takes longer. It's 25 for the wedding and 25 for baby. It appears to take young people longer to graduate from college, settle into careers and buy their first homes. What are they waiting for? Who are these permanent adolescents, these twentysomething Peter Pans? And why can't they grow up?

Everybody knows a few of them—full-grown men and women who still live with their parents, who dress and talk and party as they did in their teens, hopping from job to job and date to date, having fun but seemingly going nowhere. Ten years ago, we might have called them Generation X, or slackers, but those labels don't quite fit anymore. This isn't just a trend, a temporary fad or a generational hiccup. This is a larger phenomenon, of a different kind and a different order.

Social scientists are starting to realize that a permanent shift has taken place in the way we live our lives. In the past, people moved from childhood to adolescence and from adolescence to adulthood, but today there is a new, intermediate phase along the way. The years from 18 until 25 have become a distinct and separate life stage, a strange, transitional never-never land between adolescence and adulthood in which people stall for a few extra years, putting off the iron cage of adult responsibility that constantly threatens to crash down on them. They're betwixt and between. You could call them twixters.

WHERE FROM?

Where did the twixters come from? And what's taking them so long to get where they're going? Some of the sociologists, psychologists and demographers who study this new life stage see it as a good thing. The twixters aren't lazy, the argument goes, they're reaping the fruit of decades of American affluence and social liberation. This new period is a chance for young people to savor the pleasures of irresponsibility, search their souls and choose their life paths. But more historically and economically minded scholars see it differently. They are worried that twixters aren't growing up

because they can't. Those researchers fear that whatever cultural machinery used to turn kids into grownups has broken down, that society no longer provides young people with the moral backbone and the financial wherewithal to take their rightful places in the adult world.

The sociologists, psychologists, economists and others who study this age group have many names for this new phase of life—"youthhood," "adulthood"—and they call people in their 20s "kidults" and "boomerang kids," none of which have quite stuck. Terri Apter, a psychologist at the University of Cambridge in England and the author of *The Myth of Maturity*, calls them "thresholders."

Apter became interested in the phenomenon in 1994, when she noticed her students struggling and flailing more than usual after college. Parents were baffled when their expensively educated, otherwise well-adjusted 23-year-old children wound up sobbing in their old bedrooms, paralyzed by indecision.

"Legally, they're adults, but they're on the threshold, the doorway to adulthood, and they're not going through it," Apter says. The percentage of 26-year-olds living with their parents has nearly doubled since 1970, from 11% to 20%, according to Bob Schoeni, a professor of economics and public policy at the University of Michigan.

Jeffrey Arnett, a developmental psychologist at the University of Maryland, favors "emerging adulthood" to describe this new demographic group, and the term is the title of his new book on the subject. His theme is that the twixters are misunderstood. It's too easy to write them off as overgrown children, he argues. Rather, he suggests, they're doing important work to get themselves ready for adulthood. "This is the one time of their lives when they're not responsible for anyone else or to anyone else," Arnett says. "So they have this wonderful freedom to really focus on their own lives and work on becoming the kind of person they want to be." In his view, what looks like incessant, hedonistic play is the twixters' way of trying on jobs and partners and personalities and making sure that when they do settle down,

SCHOOL DAZE

Matt Swann is 27. He took 6 1/2 years to graduate from the University of Georgia. When he finally finished, he had a brand-spanking-new degree in cognitive science, which he describes as a wide-ranging interdisciplinary field that covers cognition, problem solving, artificial intelligence, linguistics, psychology, philosophy and anthropology. All of which is pretty cool, but its value in today's job market is not clear. "Before the '90s maybe, it seemed like a smart guy could do a lot of things," Swann says. "Kids used to go to college to get educated. That's what I did, which I think now was a bit naive. Being smart after college doesn't really mean anything. 'Oh, good, you're smart. Unfortunately your productivity's s____, so we're going to have to fire you.'

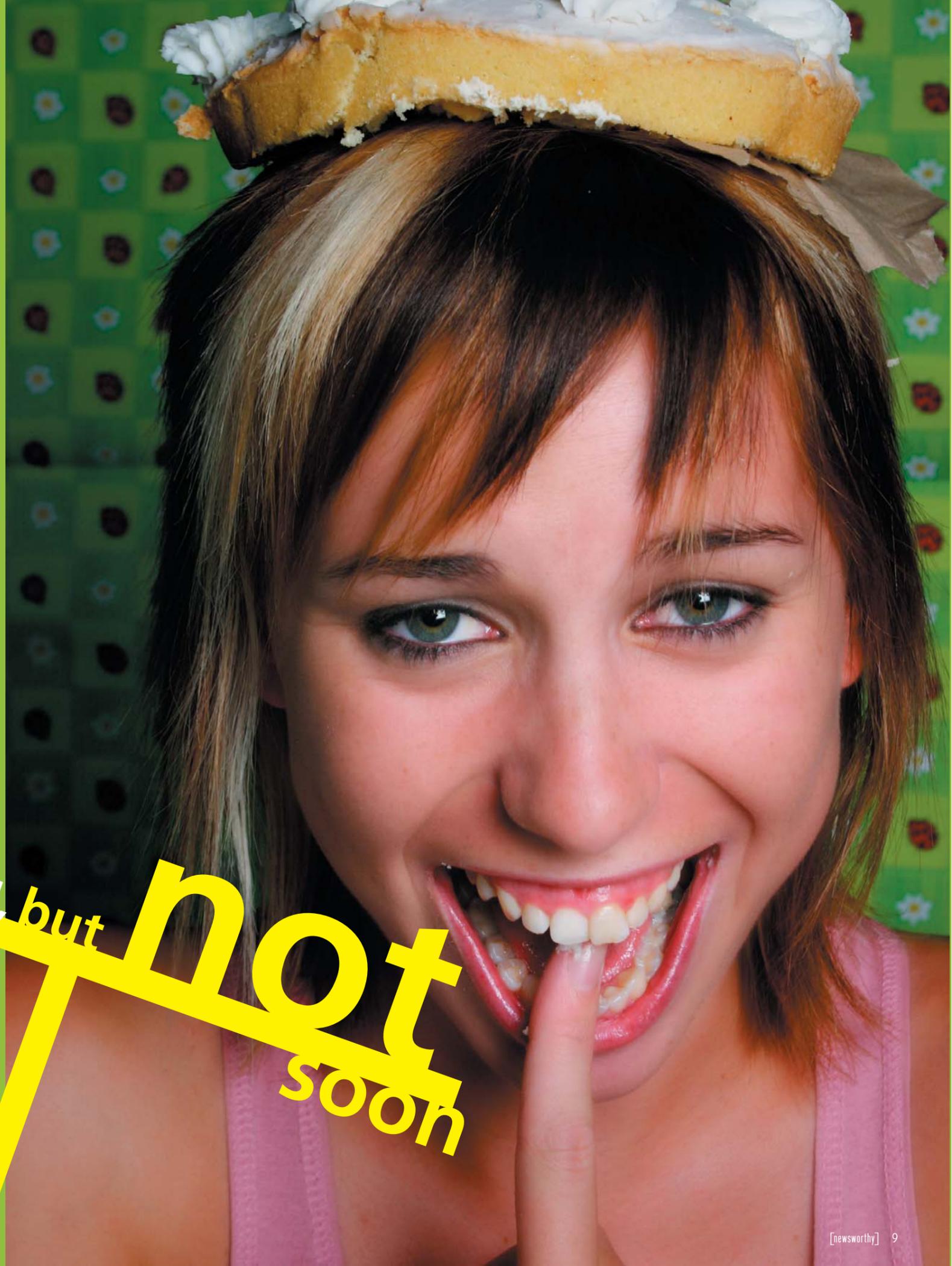
College is the institution most of us entrust to watch over the transition to adulthood, but somewhere along the line that transition has slowed to a crawl. In a TIME poll of people ages 18 to 29, only 32% of those who attended college left school by age 21. In fact, the average college student takes five years to finish. The era of the four-year college degree is all but over.

Swann graduated in 2002 as a newly minted cognitive scientist, but the job he finally got a few months later was as a waiter in Atlanta. He waited tables for the next year and a half. It proved to be a blessing in disguise.

Swann says he learned more real-world skills working in restaurants than he ever did in school. "It taught me how to deal with people. What you learn as a waiter is how to treat people fairly, especially when they're in a bad situation." That's especially valuable in his current job as an insurance-claims examiner.

There are several lessons about twixters to be learned from Swann's tale. One is that most colleges are seriously out of step with the real world in getting students ready to become workers in the postcollege world. Vocational schools like DeVry and Strayer, which focus on teaching practical skills, are seeing a mini-boom. Their enrollment grew 48% from 1996 to 2000. More traditional schools are scrambling to give their

i want to get married, but not soon





i am having too

much fun

Recent college graduates owe 85% more in student loans than their counterparts of a decade ago, according to the Center for Economic and Policy Research. In TIME's poll, 66% of those surveyed owed more than \$10,000 when they graduated, and 5% owed more than \$100,000. (And this says nothing about the credit-card companies that bombard freshmen with offers for cards that students then cheerfully abuse. Demos, a public-policy group, says credit-card debt for Americans 18 to 24 more than doubled from 1992 to 2001.) The longer it takes to pay off those loans, longer it takes twixters to achieve the financial independence that's crucial to attaining an adult identity, not to mention the means to get out of their parents' house.

Meanwhile, those expensive, time-sucking college diplomas have become worth less than ever. So many more people go to college now—a 53% increase since 1970—that the value of a degree on the job market has been diluted. The advantage in wages for college-degree holders hasn't risen significantly since the late 1990s, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. To compensate, a lot of twixters

courses a practical spin. In the fall, Hendrix College in Conway, Arkansas, will introduce a program called the Odyssey project, which the school says will encourage students to "think outside the book" in areas like "professional and leadership development" and "service to the world." Dozens of other schools have set up similar initiatives.

As colleges struggle to get their students ready for real-world jobs, they are charging more for what they deliver. The resulting debt is a major factor in keeping twixters from moving on and growing up. Thirty years ago, most financial aid came in the form of grants, but now the emphasis is on lending, not on giving.

go back to school for graduate and professional degrees. Swann, for example, is planning to head back to business school to better his chances in the insurance game. But piling on extra degrees costs precious time and money and pushes adulthood even further into the future.

WORK IN PROGRESS

Kate Galantha, 29, spent seven years working her way through college, transferring three times. After she finally graduated from Columbia College in Chicago (major: undeclared) in 2001, she moved to Portland, Ore., and went to work as a nanny and as an assistant to a wedding photographer. A year later she jumped back to Chicago. It was a full-time position with real benefits, but she soon burned out and headed for the territories,

a.k.a. Madison, Wis. "I was really busy but not accomplishing anything," she says. "I didn't want to stay just for a job."

She had no job offers in Madison, and the only person she knew there was her older sister, but she had nothing tying her to Chicago (her boyfriend had moved to Europe) and she needed a change. The risk paid off. She got a position as an assistant at a photo studio, and she loves it. "I decided it was more important to figure out what to do and to be in a new environment," Galantha says. "It's exciting, and I'm in a place where I can accomplish everything. But starting over is the worst."

Galantha's frenetic hopping from school to school, job to job and city to city may look like aimless wandering. (She has moved six times since 1999. Her father calls her and her sister gypsies.) But Emerging Adulthood's Arnett—and Galantha—see it differently. To them, the period from 18 to 25 is a kind of sandbox, a chance to build castles

and knock them down, experiment with different careers, knowing that none of it really counts. After all, this is a world of overwhelming choice: there are 40 kinds of coffee beans at Whole Foods Market, 205 channels on DirecTV, 15 million personal ads on Match.com and 800,000 jobs on Monster.com. Can you blame Galantha for wanting to try them all? She doesn't want to play just the hand she has been dealt. She wants to look through the whole deck. "My problem is I'm really overstimulated by everything," Galantha says. "I feel there's too much information out there at all times. There are too many doors, too many people, too much competition."

Twixters expect to jump laterally from job to job and place to place until they find what they're looking for. The stable, quasi-parental bond between employer and employee is a thing of the past, and neither feels much obligation to make the relationship permanent. "They're well aware of the fact that they will not work for the same company for the rest of their life," says Bill Frey, a demographer with the Brookings Institution, a think tank based in Washington. "They don't think long-term about health care or Social Security. They're concerned about their careers and immediate gratification."

Twixters expect a lot more from a job than a paycheck. Maybe it's a reaction to the greed-is-good 1980s or to the whatever-is-whatever apathy of the early 1990s. More likely, it's the way they were raised, by parents who came of age in the 1960s as the first generation determined to follow its bliss, who want their children to change the world the way they did. Maybe it has to do with advances in medicine. Twixters can reasonably expect to live into their 80s and beyond, so their working lives will be extended accordingly and when they choose a career, they know they'll be there for a while. But whatever the cause, twixters are looking for a sense of purpose and importance in their work, something that will add meaning to their lives, and many don't want to rest until they find it. [n]

Inside the world of the twixters

The markers of adulthood haven't changed for people ages 18 to 29, yet over a third of twixters don't consider themselves grown up and they cite a variety of reasons for their delayed entry into adulthood.

