

ORAL CONCOURS 2014

ANGLAIS - LVI

Telling a young person to 'Just get a job' is like going to the Sahara and yelling 'Just rain!'

In a society where it's considered rude to answer "yes" to the question "Does anyone want the last scone?" (especially if they're at the next table, I've learned), it's amazing how many people will happily go up to a young jobseeker, pick up their last shred of self-esteem and dunk it in their tea until it disintegrates into soggy clumps....]

"Get a job" Today's youth has spent years chasing qualifications no one ever asks us about. The notion that algebra would ever be useful seemed fishy, but the grownups insisted: education, no matter how apparently arbitrary, leads to jobs. But the minute we graduated, something switched in employers' heads. The same generation who had us sit Sats and the 11-plus and the 12-plus and Sats again and mock GCSEs and real GCSEs and AS-levels and A-levels and BAs and MAs and MScs and PhDs decided education is an afterthought. Experience is what's really important. Which none of us had, because we'd been busy pretending Romeo and Juliet weren't just horny teenagers and Pythagoras wasn't the most tedious bastard that ever existed.

We were told that education was a ticket to employment, when really it's more like vague directions to the station. We've all watched the Gen Y horror show unfold. We all know many entry-level positions are now filled with cycles of interns, that underemployment is cleverly hidden by internships or zero-hour contracts, that an unprecedented number of jobs created are part-time. By October last year, long-term youth unemployment had risen to four times the 2004 figures (oh, and tripled in the first three years of the coalition). So telling a young person, "Just get a job" is not tough love. It's like going to the Sahara, looking up and yelling "Just rain!" Which is weird. Stop it.

"You think you're too good for a job at Costa" Graduates expect too much. That's the line – often stated as if it came out of the blue. After our American-dream style "You can do anything!" upbringings, apologies if it takes us a while to recover from the disappointment of realising it was all, well, a dream.

The "job snobs" snub acknowledges that traditionally competitive industries are double-locking their doors, while ignoring the fact that low-skilled jobs are as rare as a worm concussion; a branch of Costa in Nottingham received 1,701 applications for eight positions. Not to be outdone, Asda got over 2,500 applications for 300 jobs. They should give scratch cards out with applications to double your chances of a win.

It's not arrogance, it's the embers of optimism. Do you think snobbery comes easily to someone who's rejected for a cleaning job for "not having enough experience"? (I knew I shouldn't have put my mum as a reference for that one.) Lest we forget, our parents and teachers asked what we wanted to be when we grew up, then demanded a ransom of education, good grades, experience and a charming interview manner. We've done what you asked, society! Release the jobs!

"You'll never get a job if you think negatively" Does anyone actually believe this hippy hogwash? That "positive thoughts" are a mystical good-things magnet? Sorry to shoot down those bluebirds that dress you in the morning, and put them in a pie, but positive feelings don't attract positive events. They're a result of them. Only actions matter – as long as jobseekers tweak their CVs for every job and turn up to interviews prepared and smiling, it really doesn't matter if they're dead inside. Empathise. Don't leap around shouting "Be positive!" like an inappropriate funeral director.

"Applying for Asda? But you have a degree!" Damned if I do, job snob if I don't. And thanks for reminding me that I've spent thousands of pounds to beg someone to let me stack their yoghurts.

"Have you tried doing an internship?" Yes, I did partake in a few rounds of "Who can earn the least for longest?" but I had to fund my expensive habit of paying for things. Don't prod a spot this sore. An internship is not a job, it's a barricade dressed as a stepping-stone. Plus you're bringing back bad memories – the excruciating awkwardness of parachuting into an office for a two-week internship can't be overstated. Inside jokes whizz around you like Dementors, and any attempt to join in with a conversation is met with stares....]

"Do something fun with all that free time!" Free time? When your life is a cycle of applying for jobs, listening to crickets and crying into sponges, you don't get to clock off....]