

The Ultimate Goal
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My first experience with a "technical" school started in 2002. I enlisted in the United States Navy and went to "A School" to become a Corpsman. "A School" in the military, is very much like technical schools throughout the United States. You are trained to do a job and do it well. Back then, I didn't think of what I was learning as a "technical skill" or "trade." For me, I was learning to do a job that I was passionate about and couldn't wait to start. Corpsman A School is almost a year long, but after that year I was trained and ready to start a career as a Navy Corpsman (medic).

I learned so much in the five years that I served in the military. I worked primarily in emergency medicine (triaging patients, starting IVs, catheters, wound repair, and so much more). After becoming extremely proficient in my skills, I became a leader. Leadership opportunities presented and I took advantage of many of them. I was our shift leader and was responsible for delegating duties of the emergency room and in time I became a CPR and EMT Instructor. I was mastering my craft, learning new skills every day, and trusted with responsibilities and leadership roles based off of the knowledge and experience that I was obtaining.

In 2007, I got married and we became pregnant with our first child, which prompted my decision to leave the Navy. After leaving the Navy I did what most young kids do, I decided to go to college. My personal situation prevented me from going to nursing school at the time, so I picked my next best option, I pursued and obtained an online bachelor's degree in psychology. About the only thing that I learned from obtaining that degree is that I would not be a very good counselor! By the time I finished my bachelor's degree, my husband and I were living on our own and we had two kids. He went to work to support us and it was my job to care for our kids (we would have never been able to afford daycare at that time). In 2012, we had our third child. I decided to take my bachelor's degree and build upon it. It was time to pursue my master's degree online. I had heard that only 10% of the population has a master's degree, so surely this was the right thing to do and would make me a desired employee when I was ready to go back to work, right? Unfortunately, no. When I graduated in 2015 with my Master's in Business Administration, after spending the last eight years raising three children, every employer that read my resume had one question for me, "What kind of experience do you have?" Does being an awesome human being that sacrificed her desires and needs for the last eight years to raise children count for anything? Does spending those last eight years in books rather than watching television count for anything? The answer ended up being a big fat, NO! What employers wanted to see was my experience. They wanted to know what I could "do," not what a piece of paper (degree) said I "knew." This put me in a bit of a pickle.

So, after all these years, money spent, research, and hours of sleep lost doing homework, it seemed as if there was no payoff. However, with persistence, things started to look up in 2016. Through networking, I found out that City College was looking for a teaching assistant in the business department. I was in! After all, there's no better teacher than a professional student, right? After a year of being a teaching assistant, another job opened up that I decided to go for,

Medical Coding/Insurance Billing Program Director. In order to qualify for the director position, you needed a master's degree. Finally!! Some pay off.

I began working as the Medical Coding/Insurance Billing Program Director in 2016, but in order to teach medical coding courses, I would have to obtain my coding certification. City College invested in me and helped me become certified. Obtaining this certification (in less than a year) felt very much like completing "A School" in 2002. I now had a skill that I was ready to use. Over the last two years I have worked on mastering this skill. I teach students how to learn medical coding and become medical coders. I design and develop the medical coding program to best meet the needs of the community and of this growing field. I have served as Vice President in the Northern Plains Chapter of the American Association of Professional Coders. I have attend conferences and classes that continue to help me cultivate my skills and become a better teacher and leader. In the last four years I have gone from being a stay at home mom that couldn't find a job because of lack of experience, to a leader in the community and in the field of medical coding. I do not discredit my own persistence and determination as a factor, but I do give a lot of thanks to my certification. My bachelor's and master's degrees are nice, but they did not open up as many opportunities for me as my certification did; not even close.

So what advice will I give my own kids when they are looking at going to college? I will tell them to first find out what it is that they want to do and DO IT! In entering the workforce, experience is key! When you begin learning your craft, set goals for yourself. Do you want to learn a new aspect of the craft? Do you want to get certified in your skill? Do you want to pursue a new skill that requires education first? Do you want to become a leader in the field? Setting your goals will help you decide what kind of further education is right for you. A certification, associate's degree, bachelor's degree, master's degree, and doctorate degree should not be goals in and of themselves. Success in your desired field and advancement in a career you enjoy should be your ultimate goal. If these certifications and degrees can help you get the career that you want, then by all means, go for them! If not, then what purpose do they serve?

I am a big fan of technical colleges! So much so that I am currently enrolled as a student at City College in the Nursing Program. Finally! I do appreciate the degrees that four-year colleges have to offer. However, after my life experiences, I place so much more value on technical colleges and the ability of technical degrees to catapult one's career. Technical colleges teach skill sets that can be mastered, look impressive on a resume, and ultimately start students on a path that will lead to a career that they enjoy. Which is "the ultimate goal."