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How To Ace College And A Career With No Student Debt: A Millennial's Story



Mark C. Perna Contributor 

Careers

I explore Millennials and Gen Z in careers, education, and the workforce.

A young, woman welder does it her way—debt free.



Mark C. Perna and Megan, Millennial welder MARK C. PERNA

College costs are skyrocketing with no cap in sight, and [student loan debt is the single biggest regret among Millennial graduates](#). Today, 19–29-year-old Americans owe [more than \\$1 trillion](#), the bulk of which is education debt. Yet many careers require a degree, despite the crippling economic burden it can create. So how can young people get the college education and career they want—without the debt?

Megan, the young woman introduced in my [last post](#) who chose an unconventional career in welding, also took an unconventional path to achieve a four-year degree, with

hard pass on student loans.

Most people don't think of welding as a typical career choice for a woman. But even less do they think of it as a springboard to college and a whole world of expanded career opportunities.

The new competitive advantage

Today In: [Leadership](#)



Individually, academic knowledge, technical competency, and professional skills are all valuable attributes to possess in the workforce. But put together, they become a dynamic competitive advantage in today's new economy.

Megan was already an A-student, but she needed technical competency and professional skills to truly get ahead. Welding gave her the opportunity to develop her hard skills while honing the attributes of a professional. Just after her 20th birthday, she was hired to weld at John Deere Davenport Works.

It's a common notion that starting a career in the trades locks you into that career forever, but Megan knows differently. Though she was thriving in her welding role, her ambitions didn't stop there. "I started taking online courses to pursue a bachelor's degree in Business Administration. I was working 40–60 hours a week and going to school full time, but I was making great money as a welder and John Deere was paying for two-thirds of my degree."

Did you catch that? Not only was Megan earning a top wage, but her employer was also financing two-thirds of the cost of her college education. In just two and a half years, Megan graduated with her bachelor's degree in business from Purdue University Global.

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Along the way, Megan honed her professional skills to succeed in the workforce. Now, she's eyeing new opportunities at John Deere. "I've applied for some engineering roles, supervisory roles, and even some roles that would involve working with customers. I've had some practice interviewing for a few of them, and I'm hopeful the right opportunity comes along soon."

Success—her way

Megan's success demonstrates the power of combining robust academic knowledge, technical competency, and professional skills. As an example of how a young person can take an unconventional path to avoid debt, get a degree, and gain a competitive advantage in the modern workforce, she's dynamic. As an ambassador for women looking to break into a typically male-dominated field, she's inspiring.

College degree? Check. No student loans for that degree? Check. A great career with infinite advancement opportunities? Check. At age 25, Megan is well on her way to the top. And the most exciting part of her story isn't even written yet. Knowing Megan, it will be smart, ambitious, and just a bit unexpected.

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I write about unleashing passion, purpose, and performance in younger generations and how that intersects education, career, workforce development, and the new multigen... **Read More**