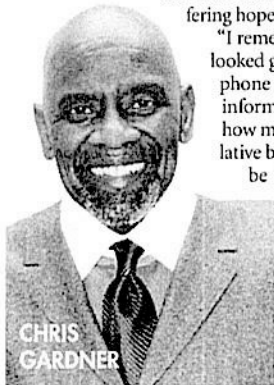


Taking the first steps toward a new life

BY RON WYNN

Author, entrepreneur and motivational speaker Chris Gardner became an international symbol of the will to survive in 2006. His incredible journey from homeless single father to fiscal guru was chronicled in both the best-selling memoir *The Pursuit of Happiness* and the blockbuster film starring Will Smith.

Now, three years later, Gardner is not only a wealthy man, but a passionate social activist determined to help others achieve personal and professional success, no matter their circumstances or background. His new book, *Start Where You Are: Life Lessons in Getting from Where You Are to Where You Want to Be* (Amistad, \$26.99, 320 pages, ISBN 9780061537110), represents the next phase in Gardner's career, offering hope and sound advice in this tough economic climate.



"So much of what happens in life comes as a result of your approach."

"I remember telling people 18 months ago when everything looked good that tough times were coming," Gardner says by phone from his Chicago office. "I didn't have access to any information or trends. I just saw some factors in terms of how much credit was out in the marketplace and the speculative buying. Now I'm determined to show people they can be totally broke today, and still, through the lessons in

this book, not only recover but eventually thrive if they are willing to do what it takes."

The book's 44 chapters distill commonsense wisdom, presented with a zeal and enthusiasm that is evident as Gardner responds to questions. "The very first thing I tell college graduates today is that if you want to get an advanced degree, now is a good time to do it, because in many cases the job you thought you earned your [first] degree to get might not exist any longer.

"But more important than that, you should find something you love and are passionate about doing. Then, assess the opportunities out there for you to do it. You might have to take a job doing something else for now, but don't forget or abandon your long-term goal," Gardner says. "You definitely should have a plan, and you've got to know the difference between who you are and what you do. Whatever job you get doesn't define who you are. That's defined by your values, your willingness to work hard, your ingenuity and your persistence."

Start Where You Are dispenses many other suggestions and strategies for getting where you want to be. One section is devoted to getting started in whatever field you want to pursue. Others look at avoiding past mistakes, the necessity for learning the ropes of a particular craft and even the boost that can be obtained from a spiritual approach.

"If people are looking for how to get rich quick, I tell them this isn't the right book for them," Gardner says. "I'm talking about improving your life, and money is really the least effective way of measuring someone's self-worth. The lessons in this book will not only help you grow and thrive as a person, they'll help you when the tough times arrive, and enable you to understand the world's not ending if you get laid off."

Gardner talks as much about joy, love and faith as he does ownership, empowerment and capital. Though the book contains chapters that deal strictly with financial matters, like Lesson #34 (Mo' Money, Mo' Options, Mo' Problems) or Lesson #29 (Share the Wealth), he's far more concerned with psychological and moral growth than fiscal improvement, and sees the latter as the natural by-product of the former. "The advice that I provide is universal," he points out. "So much of what happens in life comes as a result of your approach, and when you change that, you can change your life."

Now CEO of the investment firm Gardner Rich LLC, Gardner also tackles causes ranging from homelessness to violence against women to financial illiteracy. He is teaming with actor Will Smith again on a forthcoming project: a network reality show, though Gardner cautions, "It won't be something sensational or exploitative. We want to do real stories and give people the opportunity for growth, change and empowerment."

Gardner and Smith are joining forces with superstar producer Mark Burnett, creator of "Survivor" and "The Apprentice," among other shows, and he's hopeful the program might be ready for the fall season, though he adds that details are still "in negotiations." So for now, Gardner will continue his lectures and work, hoping that *Start Where You Are* will prove as transformative and inspirational as *The Pursuit of Happiness*. ☺

Ron Wynn writes for the Nashville City Paper and other publications.



Required reading for recent grads

BY JOANNA BRICHETTO

New graduates, do not despair. Although you will undoubtedly need all the creativity, energy and flexibility you can muster, the dismal job market is still a job market. And frankly, the world needs your talents now more than ever. But, before you upload a panicked résumé to Monster.com or mass email a hasty cover letter to anonymous corporations, find out what it takes to land a job for which you are truly suited: a real step along a real career path. These four new books are designed to help.



You Majored in What? Mapping Your Path from Chaos to Career (Viking, \$25.95, 304 pages, ISBN 9780670020829) by Katherine Brooks helps new grads formulate not just a decent response to that inevitable question, but a realistic career path—no matter the major. The author, a nationally recognized career coach, debunks standard linear thinking about college majors, and opens readers to a far wider world of exciting and appropriate professional opportunities. Her systematic method maps out insights, life experiences, academic histories and other clues using graphically appealing formulas and charts. Particular attention is paid to "unplanned events and emerging conditions" that can alter circumstances at any time. As patterns and themes emerge, readers conduct small experiments to discover what they truly enjoy, and then build strategies to find a profession to match. The book concludes with lessons in storytelling, résumé writing, and interviewing, which will, one hopes, make the next step inevitable: a rewarding new job.

Can I Wear My Nose Ring to the Interview? A Crash Course in Finding, Landing, and Keeping Your First Real Job (Workman, \$13.95, 227 pages, ISBN 9780761141457) by Ellen Gordon Reeves is designed to answer any and all real-life questions of the newly employable. Crash course though it may be, the book still demands readers take the time to get organized, set a timeline and plan a strategy. Strategies include informational interviews, formal and informal networking queries and, of course, the creation of pitch-perfect cover letters and résumés.



The many realistic models for good and bad examples of the latter are especially helpful. Also great is the section on interviewing, where examples and what-ifs cover virtually every situation that might crop up. But Reeves' advice does not end with the job offer: a whole chapter is dedicated to becoming a good employee and colleague. (And by they way, the answer to the nose ring question is yes, if you plan on wearing it to work. Discretion and disclosure are a delicate balance.)



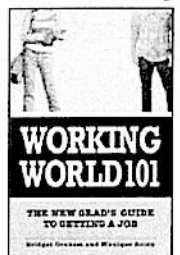
Secret for success: keep it simple

J.R. Parrish's *You Don't Have to Learn the Hard Way: Making it in the Real World* (BenBella, \$19.95, 224 pages, ISBN 9781933771748) takes a different approach. Parrish, a self-made real estate magnate from Silicon Valley, gives teens and new graduates the benefit of his hard-won wisdom with a guide to life, personal and professional. By sharing the basic principles responsible for his own success—especially mentorship, people skills and self-discipline—he hopes to coach others

to set and achieve life goals. Human relations, habits, career, love and truth are some of the crucial headings under which his secrets of success are revealed. Mini-quizzes help readers assess their own personal traits, patterns and areas for improvement.

Working World 101: The New Grad's Guide to Getting a Job (Adams Media, \$13.95, 256 pages, ISBN 9781598694956) by Bridget Graham and Monique Reidy draws upon years of cumulative human resource experience to present a tight, no-nonsense how-to: how to move successfully from campus to corporation. After completing a personal and professional inventory, readers are ready to hone communication skills to create a self-confident, capable, poised new product: themselves. Communication is a key theme of the guide; it drives the preparation of a résumé and cover letter, the formation of a network, choice of dress and speech and the whole interview process. A handy list of online job search sites is included, as is advice on how best to use social networking sites like Facebook and more professional networking sites like LinkedIn. The authors are especially sensitive to generational challenges between Baby Boomer employers and ever-younger employees, and are quick to suggest ways to package differences advantageously.

Packaging is a common theme of all of these guides, but packaging with scrupulous attention to content (what is inside), direction (where it is headed), and intention (how it will get there). The package is, of course, the bright young thing poised to take the crummy economy by storm: you. ☺



Joanna Brichetto writes from Nashville.