



# Stanford eCorner

## Off the Trodden Career Path

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Stan Christensen, partner at [Arbor Advisors](#) and Stanford instructor, advises those planning a career not to be overly concerned with a linear path. While certainly there are some jobs that require specific training and expertise, the majority of positions in the business world are available to the savvy and the willful who are willing to work their way in.



### Transcript

So I came out here at Silicon Valley and I thought I want to learn about technology. I do not have any background in technology. I'm not qualified but I bet I can find someone that will hire me. It was the late 90's and anybody even me with a liberal arts undergrad and a business degree without any technology could get a job. And so I get a job at a small store after five people there before I got there. It was called eSOL. We built a graphical interface for Linux, so you can use Linux on desktop computers. And those of you that are engineers know that if you take a liberal arts guy with a business degree and put him on a Linux company, it is not obvious. When I was running Linux on my desktop, and I could barely spell Linux, but it did not really matter about six months and two, I was speaking at Linux users group meetings, to engineers, and you know, the startup like so many startups in late 90's, way up and way down, and we actually did not get our second round of finances. I spent 10 years doing it and learned some things, but it did not work out financially.

It did not make the millions that everyone is hoping to make when I came out here in the late 90's. So next the question is what I would do now? And I thought, OK, what I really want to do is to make some money. My background in negotiation is sort of how I apply that to make money, I thought, we will start an investment bank, and people saw we cannot start on an investment bank. I mean, you are not qualified. You got two years as an analyst years ago, and it does not really qualify to start an investment bank, but when we met this other guy and we talked about it and the two of us started Arbor Advisors. That was eight years ago and we had quite a bit of success and fun doing it. The point to that is I was not qualified to start an investment bank and it did not matter. And so I think the point here of so many students come to me with a linear approach. Like I need to do this, and this, and this and build my resume over time. I just do not think now obviously in some careers, you know, if you are going to be a neurosurgeon, like my father was, he cannot wing it, you got to have the right training and go to medical school and have residency and a fellowship.

But for most business roles and many of you will go into business, whether it is sales, marketing, corpdev, bizdev, I do not think that much of it is that difficult. I think you can sort of work your way into whatever job you want and so that message is really important. But don't follow a linear path because you think that's the only way to go forward or have fun in your career. Qualifications often don't matter.