



June 2005

## Even Workers with “McJobs” Deserve Respect

By James K. Glassman

*Entry-level positions long criticized as “dead-end jobs” deserve respect as stepping-stones to greater success, as these jobs teach the basics of business to new workers.*

In May the hoary New York Stock Exchange announced a plan to merge with Archipelago, a modern electronic market. Many floor traders, who actually control the NYSE through their ownership of seats on the exchange, are panicky over this development, and they recently met with John Thain, CEO of the stock exchange and the man who put the deal together.

“The morning meeting grew testy,” *Newsweek* reported. Some traders asked if they would lose their jobs as the NYSE moved into a new era. Thain replied sharply that anyone who could not add value to the organization could “walk out the door and get a job at McDonald’s.”

Not only does this nasty crack reveal the unhappiness over the proposed merger, but it also shows a distressing tendency in American society: the growing disparagement of jobs considered menial.

Out-of-work floor traders are not going to become cashiers at McDonald’s or sales clerks at Wal-Mart, but millions of Americans get their start this way, and they deserve respect, not a cynical put-down from a Wall Street fat cat who makes \$4 million a year.

Thain is not alone. The derisive term “McJobs”—used to describe supposedly dead-end employment, especially among restaurant and

retail workers—is gaining wide use. A Google search turned up 24,500 references.

Another favorite term among those who scoff at those below them is “burger flipper.” During the 2004 campaign, MoveOn.org ran an ad in Ohio which, according to *National Journal*, featured “a dejected middle-age worker flipping burgers as an announcer says, ‘After a year, you finally land another job. And you wonder, “Is this what you worked your whole life for?’””

### Dead-End Jobs?

The truth is that few middle-aged Americans hold such jobs. Instead, they go to people who enter the workforce with a modest background in the fundamentals—showing up on time, cooperating with colleagues, operating simple machines, making change, greeting customers with courtesy. These basics, unfortunately, are not taught in all our schools. Workers learn on the job, typically as teenagers.

Most learn quickly and do well on the job, and they move up the ladder to better-paying work. That is the norm in America, and it makes us different from practically every other nation. A study in 2000, for instance, found that two-thirds of minimum-wage workers moved above that pay within a year, with a median raise, for full-time employees, of 14 percent.

“Entry-level jobs,” writes Mark Wilson of the Heritage Foundation, “are not lifelong dead-end jobs. These jobs allow Americans to establish a

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track record of work that creates opportunities for better-paying jobs.”

Among the well-known Americans (hardly dead-enders) who once worked at McDonald's are Andy Card, White House chief of staff; Jeff Bezos, founder and CEO of Amazon.com; astronaut Leroy Chiao; Jay Leno, *Tonight Show* host, who called the restaurant “a great place to work”; Representative Pat Tiberi (R-Ohio); Carl Lewis, Olympic gold medalist; actress Andie McDowell; architect Maya Lin; former Indiana governor Joe Kernan; Drew Nieporent, owner of Tribeca Grill and other trendy restaurants in New York who started out at McDonald's, he says, as a “Quarter Pounder grill man”; and Robert Cornog, retired CEO of Snap-On Tools, who worked at the original McDonald's in Des Plaines, Illinois.

Cornog told Dow Jones News Service that the best lesson he learned at McDonald's was “discipline, if you're going to produce a result, you need a process.”

Some 1,200 owners of McDonald's restaurants started as crew members (no dead end for them!). So did twenty

of McDonald's fifty top worldwide managers, among them Jim Skinner, McDonald's CEO, who told Dow Jones that what he learned from his early experience was self-confidence: “I hadn't dealt with the public before then.”

Another myth is that food service and retail companies do not look out for the welfare of their workers. Sure, some are irresponsible, but most understand that it is in their own best interest to keep employees happy.

Starbucks, for example, offers extensive health-care benefits, an adoption assistance plan, plus a pound of coffee a week. Home Depot has medical, dental, life, and disability insurance and a 50-percent reimbursement for tuition up to \$5,000 a year. For its 401(k) retirement plan, McDonald's provides generous matching contributions.

A robust and just economy is one that offers a wide variety of jobs for the skilled and unskilled, for those starting out and those with deep experience. Let's drop

the term “McJobs” and instead pay tribute to workers at all levels—even to floor traders and CEOs at archaic stock exchanges.

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