

All Careers Considered, Season 1 Episode 1: Lumberjane for a Summer with Maria Cambone

Hey Hoosiers, welcome back to Season 2 of All Careers Considered. I'm Maria Cambone, a career coach at the Walter Center for Career Achievement, the career center for undergraduate and graduate students in the College of Arts + Sciences at Indiana University Bloomington. Today, instead of sharing tips with you about how to jumpstart your career search or talking to an IU alumnus or alumna, I'm going to take a different approach.

I'm going to tell you the story of how I became a lumberjack on a chainsaw crew in Colorado, and how I leveraged that work experience into a full-time job offer after college.

In the Spring 2010 semester, nobody knew what to do about finding internships or even a summer part-time job. Thanks to the 2008 recession, lawyers were flipping burgers, med students were working as camp counselors, and word on the street was that companies were shutting the door on their internship programs in order to tighten their belts.

As a 20-year-old sophomore who was majoring in International Affairs, I didn't want to live with my parents and hang out in my friends' basements playing video games all day. I wanted to earn money, travel, and have a cool summer experience. But I didn't know what to do!

On a whim, I called my cousin Trina who had graduated from college in 2009 and moved out to Colorado. I asked her if she knew of any jobs out her way, especially ones that provided room and board. She connected me with her seasonal work crew boss at the Arapaho Roosevelt National Forest in Idaho Springs, Colorado. He asked me to apply on usajobs.gov, and then gave me a short interview over the phone: could I lift 50 pounds? Could I hike 7-10 miles a day? Did I have any experience working with tools outdoors? Yes! On the spot, I was hired to join a "Pine Beetle Mitigation Crew," told I could live in the forest service bunkhouse for the summer, and informed that I was to show up for work three days after classes let out for the summer.

I flew to Colorado with one duffel bag of clothes for the summer. On my first day, I met my crewmates: my skinny little cousin and me alongside eight burly MEN with big beards. During the first four hours, we watched a lot of chainsaw safety videos, then we learned how to take apart a saw and oil it, fuel it, and sharpen the chain by hand. I had imagined that I was joining a crew in charge of spraying trees to prevent beetles from invading them, and this training didn't seem to fit that image, but I went along with what we were doing.

At lunch, I sat down on the back of the pickup beside my crew boss, Nick, took a bite of my PB&J, and asked, "So why are we learning all this stuff about chainsaws?" He laughed at me, then realized I was serious. That was when he told me: "You're on a lumberjack crew, Maria."

Even though that summer experience didn't have anything to do with my major, it makes for an incredible, memorable story. Moreover, I learned the importance of clear, timely communication in teams in high-risk environments. I demonstrated that I was able to learn new skills on the go, ask clarifying questions to keep our workflow running smoothly, and that I was willing to be challenged by unexpected situations.

Because I kept an open mind and used my network to find a summer job that was really exciting to me, even if it seemed off the beaten path from my major and career goals, I was able to have a unique, incredible summer in college. I traveled, I got fit, and I made a lot of money. After I got back, I learned how to *tell my story* in a way that was *memorable* and *persuasive* to the people I spoke with, so I was often able to score second-round interviews.

I combined this with my experience working as a student employee at the Disability Student Services office at my college to get my first full-time job after college, where I worked at an IT company that works to make websites accessible to people with disabilities. My experience as a lumberjack even helped me to get my job as a career coach today, because I told my interviewers that if I could sell my experience as a lumberjack to get a job in editing and IT, I could teach any student to sell their experience and market their own skills and stories to exciting employers.

So, my advice to you: keep an open mind. Don't be afraid to do something totally unrelated to what you think you might want your career to be. Do something that you love. Challenge yourself. This summer, you may need to do something unexpected. Go do it! Then, practice sharing your story persuasively. Think about how to connect the dots for employers to show your strengths, even if they appear in unexpected ways. You *can* leverage your experiences – even if they seem off-the-beaten-path – to lead you to a fulfilling career that makes you happy.

Want to hear more content like this? Check out our next episode of All Careers Considered, where Molly will be interviewing Rishika Murthy, an alumna from IU Bloomington who graduated with her Master's in Journalism in 2009, during the Great Recession. Rishika has a great story to share about freelancing in South Korea and solid advice on how to turn lemons into lemonade during an economic hit like the one we're facing now.

You can also connect with me personally to hear more about my story or to ask for my 1:1 advice or support. I encourage you to make a career coaching appointment online at the Walter Center website, connect with me on LinkedIn, or send me an email at mcambone@iu.edu.

Stay healthy and stay safe out there. Until next time, Hoosiers!