



HOW TO FIND CAREERS SUPPORT IN AN EVOLVING LANDSCAPE

JACK PARSONS GREW UP WITH BIG AMBITIONS, BECOMING CEO OF HIS OWN COMPANY WHEN HE WAS 25 YEARS OLD AND THE UK'S CHIEF YOUTH OFFICER. HE TELLS US MORE ABOUT THE YOUTH GROUP, ITS RESOURCES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AND HOW HE MANAGED TO FIND CAREER SUCCESS DESPITE OTHERS' LOW EXPECTATIONS FOR HIS FUTURE

ABOUT JACK



Jack, the UK Government's Chief Youth Officer, a global mental health ambassador and founder of The Youth Group, did not have the easiest start in life. He comes from a low income family, is dyslexic and had very little support from his school, but he did not let these challenges prevent him from being ambitious. Jack delivered newspapers in his early teens to fund judo classes and, after leaving school, took an apprenticeship with a local insurance broker. After the company folded, and a few months trying to find work without a degree, he was taken on by a recruitment firm. By the age of 21, Jack became top biller, made £700,000 in revenue for the company and won awards. And yet, he still found that there were fewer opportunities open to him without degree-level qualifications. This is when he founded The Youth Group, a social enterprise that helps connect young people with relevant opportunities and prepare them for the world of work.

IN A RECENT INTERVIEW FOR CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE NOW, YOU SAID, "NO ONE AT SCHOOL HAD HIGH HOPES FOR ME". WHY WAS THIS SO?

With 32,028 schools in the UK and so many moving parts, there's bound to be challenges. In my case I was one of the unlucky ones. Teachers do such a good job with the resources they have, but I was missed. Those I looked up to, looked down at me. Far more progress has been made now, although there will be other young people like me still feeling like there's no one they can trust or confide in. One thing I've kept close to my chest is never letting feelings of despair tear me down because there is always a future that awaits.

YOU ALSO SAID THE SCHOOL SYSTEM WAS UNLIKELY TO HELP YOU GET THE RIGHT OPPORTUNITIES IN LIFE. WHAT OPPORTUNITIES ARE YOU REFERRING TO?

I have a curtain analogy. Everyone has the ability to open a curtain, and what lies behind the curtain is opportunity. One person may have the power to unveil a career curtain for you, or a curtain that expands your network, or help you connect to people who have two curtains instead of one. This is why aiming to open as many curtains as possible, regardless of the barriers others may place on you, is worthwhile.

Lots of young people will be experiencing the same things. In my case, after looking at my mock exam grades, the careers advisor said I should work on a building site because I wasn't going to reach my grades. When exams were over, I achieved 11 A* to C grades and I chose a different path to the one laid out for me. This is something that wasn't explained to me – the idea that you can say no to what you have been advised.

HOW DO YOU THINK YOUR LIFE WOULD HAVE BEEN DIFFERENT IF YOU HAD BEEN GIVEN SOLID CAREERS ADVICE AT SCHOOL?

There are an incredible number of careers entering the market now that didn't exist 20 years ago. Vlogging and digital marketing are just two examples that have absolutely erupted as a result of the booming technology



sector. Therefore, the question should not be: 'What does solid careers advice mean to you?' but 'How might the correct advice support me in an evolving landscape?'. This is a much more challenging question due to the uncertainty our futures hold – even if statistics can be used to predict growth areas.

What I can say is that I'm incredibly grateful to those who have opened curtains for me to now focus my attention on enabling young people to thrive across the UK.

AS THE UK'S CHIEF YOUTH OFFICER AND CEO OF YOUR OWN BUSINESS, YOU ARE PROOF THAT OPPORTUNITIES ARE OPEN TO PEOPLE FROM DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUNDS. AREN'T YOU?!

I absolutely agree. Opportunities are now far more accessible due to the internet providing us with increased access to individuals living thousands of miles away. The world of work has been sliced in half, with freelancing opportunities allowing people to get closer to being their own boss.

However, this then leads to a digital divide. Those who don't have access to technology that will enable them to make magic happen fall behind, which is why there needs to be a huge drive to ensure that those from disadvantaged backgrounds have access to the tools they need to fulfil their potential in today's world.

EARLIER IN THE YEAR, YOU MET UP WITH THE UK CHANCELLOR RISHI SUNAK AND HAVE MET OTHER UK MINISTERS. WHAT DOES YOUR ROLE AS UK'S CHIEF YOUTH OFFICER ENTAIL?

I'm very supportive of government officials who put their money where their mouth is when it comes to keeping two ears open to hear what the challenges are for young people.

To me, being the UK's Chief Youth Officer means enabling as many young people to thrive as possible across the nation. It's a public figure

role that champions the interests of all young people across the country, getting them heard at the board table and officially in government. This is achieved in large part thanks to opportunities provided through The Youth Group, the 1.7 million young people in our community and the work my team does to support this role.

IN AN INTERVIEW WITH THE BBC, YOU ADVISED UNIVERSITY STUDENTS STRUGGLING TO FIND WORK PLACEMENTS TO RIP UP THEIR CVS. WHY?

Many may disagree with me, however, there's a feeling amongst young people that no matter how many CVs they send, little to no progress is made. Not to mention how difficult it is for recruiters to read and process CVs. This makes it an inefficient system, leading to shortcuts being made, which, in turn, means young people are inevitably left behind.

Recruiters spend on average six seconds looking at your CV before they decide to look into it further or reject it. The formatting in CVs also becomes distorted online, meaning that your CV can look very different on one device compared to another. A lot of space is wasted on additional lines and columns. There can be a boost of at least 25% which will enable the evidencing over more meaningful traits.

CVs need to be revised to reflect the many experiences young people do have rather than what they don't have, which many recruiters tend to focus on.

ARE YOU HOPEFUL THAT THINGS WILL CHANGE FOR THE BETTER FOR YOUNG PEOPLE?

Absolutely! With so many opportunities entering our doors every second, there is a huge amount of hope for young people. Never before could a young person have the flexibility many corporations and small companies are starting to offer. Everyone can be their own boss if they have a side-project that could turn into a business.



THE YOUTH GROUP

THE YOUTH GROUP IS A YOUTH-FIRST ORGANISATION THAT PROVIDES YOUNG PEOPLE WITH THE TOOLS THEY NEED TO GET AHEAD IN THE WORLD OF WORK. CEO AND FOUNDER JACK PARSONS EXPLAINS HOW THE YOUTH GROUP HAS HELPED OVER 90,000 YOUNG PEOPLE ALL OVER THE WORLD

WHAT BARRIERS DO YOUNG PEOPLE FACE IN THE WORLD OF WORK TODAY?

The main challenge for young people today is finding a reliable network of professionals and role models. Not having those essential contacts can really impact the confidence and mental health of those who are just starting out, leading them to miss out on valuable opportunities. This is especially true since the pandemic, which has increased a sense of isolation.

However, we are living in the best time to make important connections, with social media playing a key role in forming professional networks and developing a personal brand.

HOW DOES THE YOUTH GROUP HELP YOUNG PEOPLE TO OVERCOME SOME OF THOSE BARRIERS?

I founded The Youth Group because I was asked by young people to create a place for them to access opportunities. After researching this further, I knew young people were facing unique challenges in the workplace that were not being addressed.

There are many barriers facing young people today. However, it all starts with defining what a barrier is. Barriers could be parents, universities, The lack of opportunities, etc. The biggest barrier right now for young people is a lack of hope for their future. So now, the question is, how do we increase young people's hope for their future? Very simply, we connect the dots. This could be connecting the dots between mentors and young people, giving young people job opportunities or ensuring young people have that sense of confidence in companies they wish to go into – elements we are focusing at a grassroots level.

WHAT NEEDED TO HAPPEN TO SET THE YOUTH GROUP UP?

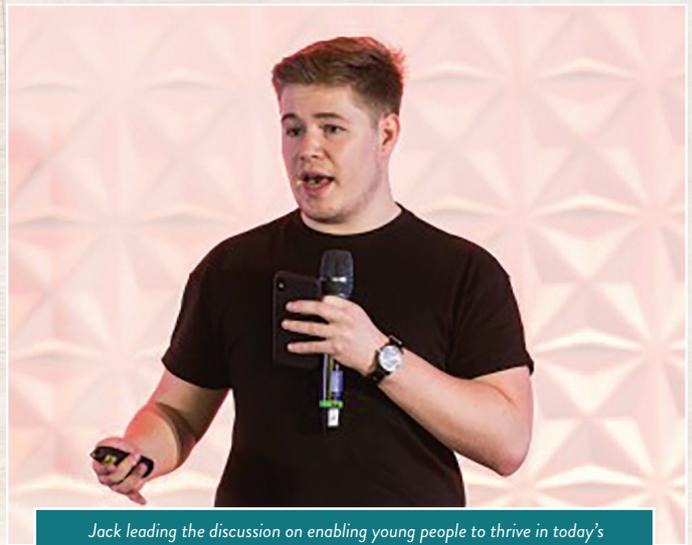
A mentor once said to me, “Surround yourself with smarter people than you”. This is the first step I had to take to ensure a company, which meaningfully supports young people, was created. Everyone has the ability to find a mentor through the work we do at The Youth Group. We are opening doors for thousands of young people to enable them to be their own boss.

When you find yourself a mentor, what do you do with them? Listening and putting their advice into practice are the two next steps I had to take. If you're used to getting things done on your own, you learn to trust yourself, however, it's a double-edged sword because then it becomes very easy to get in the mindset you know best, when, in fact, there is always more and more to learn.

THROUGH THE YOUTH GROUP, YOUNG PEOPLE CAN ACCESS MENTORS. WHAT CAN THEY EXPECT FROM THE LIKES OF MARTIN MOLL, CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER AT HONDA, JESS BUTCHER (MBE), CO-FOUNDER OF TICK, OR RAKESH PATEL, DIRECTOR AT SPOTIFY?

Expert navigators. Navigating the job market without connections or guidance is a daunting task; our mentors can bridge that knowledge gap by giving mentees an essential insight into how to achieve self-realisation.

Regardless of whether a mentor is employed at an organisation that can offer that 'dream job', or has a recognisable name, young people can expect a variety of confident leaders dedicated to their personal and professional development.



Jack leading the discussion on enabling young people to thrive in today's world, *Be Your Own Boss*, Edinburgh. Photo credit: Jack Parsons



Jack hosting a panel in front of a large and engaged crowd of young people, *The Youth Group Live Sessions*, London. Photo credit: Jack Parsons

THE YOUTH GROUP ALSO HAS A JOBS BOARD, PROVIDING YOUNG PEOPLE WITH ACCESS TO APPRENTICESHIPS, WORK PLACEMENTS, GRADUATE PROGRAMMES AND MUCH MORE. HOW IS THE YOUTH GROUP ABLE TO OFFER ACCESS TO EXCLUSIVE JOBS THAT AREN'T AVAILABLE ONLINE?

Jobs boards are brilliant! What makes ours so special is the ringfenced opportunities we bring to the table, making it super tantalising for the young person joining because they will have access to a world of opportunity. Many of the amazing partners we have see this, which is why they sign up to meaningfully support the young people in our community.

ON THE JOBS PAGE, THE YOUTH GROUP PROMISES 'NO MORE LONG AND BORING APPLICATIONS'. HOW ARE YOUNG PEOPLE RECRUITED TO THE ROLES ON OFFER?

We simplify what we do to evidence what skills young people have over what they don't have, which, in effect, is a method to break the circle of 'no experience, therefore, no job, therefore, no experience'.

Instead, we have profiles dedicated to ensuring that the best possible pairings are made, between job roles and applicants. These profiles have been hugely popular with our youth applicants, which is why they're a bigger part of the process now.

SO FAR, 90,432 YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE BENEFITED FROM THE YOUTH GROUP, WHICH PLEDGES TO PUT TWO MILLION YOUNG PEOPLE INTO WORK ACROSS THE WORLD. WHAT WILL HAPPEN WHEN THIS PLEDGE HAS BEEN ACHIEVED?

A network is only as strong as its reach. Continuing to grow and adapt to a changing market will be essential to remain relevant, and to ensure that the challenges young people will face in five or ten years will always be addressed.

Diversity in backgrounds, experience and walks of life is and will continue to be a priority at The Youth Group, even when we reach our current goal.

ENGAGE WITH JACK AND THE YOUTH GROUP!

 @JacksonRParsons

 Jack Parsons

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 The Youth Group

 The Youth Group Music List

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