Key Concepts:
know-how
co-operative education
service learning
knowledge flow

Chapter 11
Improving Your Job Odds: Know-How vs. Know-What

Earlier, we discussed how the college decision is different in the 21st century. Now we want to add one more element for you to consider when you think about the big picture of how college will prepare you for entry into the world of work. "What" you learn at college has always been important, but in today's marketplace, it's only part of the picture. In an economy that rewards knowledge, it's not just "know-what" that will get you employed and help keep you that way. It's "know-how."

Here's a true story that illustrates the difference between "know-what" and "know-how." Picture a precocious 11-year-old boy walking the midway of carny games at a county fair, the $10 he had just earned by mowing his grandmother's yard burning a hole in his pocket. After sizing up the assortment of games offered, he stops to study one booth promising stuffed animals bigger than the boy himself to anyone who can take one shot at pool, successfully calling which ball would go in which hole.

"I think I'm going to try that," he says, after a few more minutes of study.

"But you don't play pool," says his much-wiser-to-the-ways-of-the-world mother, sure that $2 is about to be instantly lost.

"Why, Mother," he says, with an air of certainty that comes from not knowing how much he doesn't know. "It's a simple matter of physics and geometry."

So he plunks down his hard-earned money, confident that his knowledge will bring him success. He walks carefully around the table, lines up his shot – red ball in the corner pocket – and taps the cue ball feebly. The white ball wobbles slowly across the table, missing the targeted red ball entirely but nudging another toward the opposite corner. Wrong ball, wrong hole, wrong path.

The game operator, seeing no others willing to part with their money so eagerly, kindly lets the boy have another try. Then another. And another. After nearly a dozen tries, the boy finally manages to apply those "simple" principles of physics and geometry well enough to get the red ball to drop into a hole. The carny, probably giving little thought to physics theories or geometric equations but relying on the expertise that comes from practice, then deftly clears the table of the remaining balls.

"Now that, my dear," says the mother, "is the difference between theory and application."

Or, in other words, the difference between knowing what to do versus knowing how to do it. That, in a nutshell, is why pundits and advisers are wrong when they throw out the term "knowledge economy" and suggest that just amassing more and more knowledge will be enough for you to get ahead. If you want to win at the game of life, grab the brass ring, make it to the corner office or simply win a supersized stuffed dog, you need know-how.