

Opinion

Work experience isn't real experience of work

To get the young unemployed into jobs we must first teach the need to show up every day

Margaret Mountford



The youth unemployment figures are unremittingly bleak. There are at present 17 million young jobless people in the EU, just under 1 million of them in the UK and this year's school leavers are expected to face the worst employment prospects for 20 years. The International Labour Organisation is predicting that on a global scale, youth unemployment will continue to rise for the next five years. Against that miserable backdrop, how to explain the experience of Barchester Healthcare. This month it reported that it had managed to enrol only 72 under-25s on its apprenticeship scheme for care workers — filling less than a fifth of available posts.

This echoed some of my own experiences filming the television series *The Town that Never Retired*, with Nick Hewer, my old colleague from *The Apprentice*. We set out to help a group of young jobseekers compete with pensioners for the same jobs.

The youngsters had sworn at the start that they were desperate for work, but some of their attitudes suggested otherwise. Some patently didn't expect to have to work in factories or on building sites. They wanted more "exciting" jobs. Most crucially, they did not seem to appreciate the basic necessity of turning up every day — and on time. And when they didn't turn up, despite spending their lives on their mobile phones, they didn't think to ring their employer to explain why. They

completely lacked a work ethic.

By contrast, the pensioners who went back to work understood exactly what was required. Some had started off working in places like the Beeches Chocolate Factory, where they were placed as trainees. For them the problems were more likely to be physical — they lacked dexterity or energy. The spirit was willing, but the flesh was sometimes weak.

There is genuine sympathy for victims of the recession, particularly for young people with little experience in a competitive jobs market. And there are worries that those who suffer unemployment in their youth may struggle to find work at all.

This is partly down to a lack of skills and too few jobs, but our experience showed that it was also about attitudes to work. Older generations did not have to be taught what was required, but many of today's young people do.

As a trustee of the Bright Ideas Trust

Despite living on their mobiles they didn't call in if they didn't turn up

I meet plenty of young people with good business ideas and the raw talent and determination to become successful, valued members of society. But they too find it hard to take their ideas further — not just because they lack funding but also because they have no real experience of the world of work.

We need to put more effort into helping young people make the transition from education to work. All schools offer work experience for those of school-leaving age, but work experience is not the same as experience of work.

Watching someone do their job for a



Margaret Mountford in the factory where young and old vied for jobs

week in an office is not the same as working in a supermarket every Saturday, where you have to turn up for a full day's shift or you don't get paid and let your colleagues down. At the Trust we see that if someone wants to set up as a hairdresser it helps if they've worked in a salon. Then they understand why you have to arrive half an hour before your first client. That is how people learn practical skills that stay with them for life, and get accustomed to life in the workplace.

All of this is much harder for youngsters from families where nobody goes out to work. They have not grown up with the pattern of a day that involves getting out of the door on time. We don't want people struggling to find work to have a sense of shame in claiming benefits, but it is a problem if welfare becomes a security blanket.

Clearly some of the young people we met felt that, however hard they tried,

no one was ever going to offer them a real job. They were too disillusioned to realise how much they would benefit from a CV saying they had done a week's work experience in a factory.

Short-term schemes that offer real experience of work are truly valuable — but not if they are seen as a way for employers to obtain long-term cheap labour. If youngsters take apprenticeships on low wages and permanent jobs are not available afterwards they must be helped to set up on their own, using the trades they have learnt.

The young entrepreneurs we work with at the Bright Ideas Trust come from groups that have traditionally found it harder to enter the business world. They're eager to fight stereotypes that show them as victims of poor education, parenting or disadvantaged backgrounds.

One example: Shawn Brown left college knowing that he wanted to run his own business and, after the birth of his daughter, needed a way to support her. He applied for help to start a cleaning business. Shawn now runs rent-a-cleaner, offering domestic and commercial cleaning services in London, employing 25 people and with an annual turnover of about £250,000. He believes that although funding was crucial for getting on his feet, the support of his mentor was invaluable. Such support needs to be continuing if we want young people to succeed.

Between June and August this year youth unemployment showed its biggest fall since the three months to November 1997. The number of 16 to 24-year-olds out of work fell 62,000 to 957,000. I don't believe the situation is as dire as the headlines suggest, but for many of those without a job, the world of work is another country.

Margaret Mountford is a trustee of the Bright Ideas Trust



In the city that never sleeps we're tired of Sandy

Tim Teeman

Superstorm Sandy has been doing what you simply don't do in New York: hanging around, staying still, not knowing when to leave the party. By yesterday afternoon, it still hadn't blown through, causing destruction and exiting stage left as the mega-blizzard of two years ago did. "Snowpocalypse" did what a New York storm should: it came, it went, we tied up.

Sandy, like a lumbering, farting Sumo wrestler, has squatted on us, causing windy, floody chaos. It's been like the worst ever houseguest. New Yorkers, not accustomed to such a stubborn cuss, have been going stir-crazy in their apartments, afraid to go out lest they are felled by scaffolding or struck by dislodged air-conditioning units; one of those scary impossibilities that suddenly become plausible when 70mph gusts barrel down Manhattan's precipitous canyons.

Before the storm, New Yorkers' legendary impatience was palpable: invariably "over" something before you're even aware of it, they had been warned of Sandy for days and were tapping their watches. When was the damn thing going to be done already?

The non-event of Hurricane Irene added another layer of "meh": that much-hyped mega-storm had us taping up our windows, buying bottles of water and tinned food and then... in the city at least, nothing. We felt cheated. So the snarky feeling about Sandy was: "OK sweetie, are you actually gonna happen?"

But yesterday jaded New Yorkers realised Mayor Bloomberg was right: "The storm is here. It's dangerous to be out there." On Sunday we had been advised to stock up on milk, water, food for at least three days. The queues outside such chattering-class paradises as Wholefoods told the true story:

Emergency supplies meant organic crisps, cheese and hoummus

"emergency supplies" meant organic crisps, good cheese, hoummus and Cabernet Sauvignon. One expert advised removing Hallowe'en decorations from stoops and balconies: joke-skeletons and pumpkins were now "lethal flying objects".

Sandy's cardinal sin has been to slow New Yorkers down, placing the city that never sleeps in enforced hibernation. The streets are almost empty, the bodega by my apartment where I can get a cheese and tomato sandwich at 3am is boarded up. Broadway shows are cancelled, airports shut, tunnels closed. Rarely has New York felt more like the island it is. No coffee-and-croissant guy with his queue of rush-hour caffeine addicts outside my apartment on 7th Avenue, no news vendor with the latest *New Yorker*.

As I write this, no one knows how "bad" Sandy will be, but even before it hit it achieved the impossible and muted Manhattan.

Tim Teeman is US correspondent

Why the Premier League is now major league

Girls, Hispanics and even PlayStation have turned soccer into a mainstream US sport

Stefan Szymanski



The decision by the US TV network NBC to pay \$250 million for the rights to Premier League games for the next three years marks yet another step on the road towards establishing soccer as a major sport in America. By raising three times the amount that the cable broadcaster Fox paid for the last contract, the deal symbolises both a move into the mainstream for the Premier League and the world's most popular game.

Soccer polarises American opinion almost as much as the presidential debates (know-nothings note: soccer is a word of English origin that was commonplace in the UK until the 1970s — Matt Busby's autobiography, published in 1973, was entitled *Soccer at the Top*. Americans have simply adopted this British-English word). Many Americans hate it; they find it tedious (no action, low scoring), fractious (diving) and downright

dangerous (hooliganism). In his book *The Meaning of Sport*, the foreign policy academic Michael Mandelbaum identified American sports with American exceptionalism, much as British imperialists once extolled cricket as the personification of British national character.

But America is also a nation of immigrants, and for more than a century they have brought their sporting allegiances with them. English and Scottish professional footballers could be found plying their trade stateside in the 19th century and domestic leagues enjoyed some success in the 1920s and 30s.

Since its foundation in 1993 Major League Soccer has won an average attendance of 5.5 million (the 11th largest football league in the world, sandwiched between Brazil and the Dutch). So far this season the Seattle Sounders are attracting an average crowd of 43,000 per game, which would rank sixth in the Premier League.

The game's popularity in the US over recent decades has been driven by a growing Hispanic population and the rise of soccer in high schools. Fifty years ago most kids focused on American football, baseball and basketball. But playing American football is in decline because of the equipment costs and the risk of injury, baseball is too hard and

for basketball you have to be tall. Soccer is popular in schools because at some level pretty much everyone can play. Importantly it is the dominant sport for girls, whose participation in school sports now rivals boys thanks to equal opportunities legislation from the 1970s.

Despite this widespread familiarity, until recently most Americans did not see soccer as a spectator option, even if they had played. The NBC contract is a sign that times are changing, and just as striking is the decision of al-Jazeera

The Seattle Sounders are attracting average crowds of 43,000

to develop its presence in the US by acquiring the rights to Spain's La Liga, Italy's Serie A, France's Ligue 1, as well as the Football League Championship.

Part of this is to do with connectedness — it is now so much easier for Americans to follow what goes on in the rest of the world. Many now watch a Premier League game on Saturday morning and then watch a college football game in the afternoon.

Another factor is PlayStation. My children got hooked on American football while living in London because

they could familiarise themselves with the strategy and personalities on the computer game. The same goes for American kids and soccer.

And it is starting to show in the TV ratings: 25 million Americans watched the World Cup final in 2010 and four million even watched the Euro 2012 final, despite not having a dog in that fight. Compare this with baseball's World Series, which finished on Sunday night with a clean sweep by the San Francisco Giants and attracted about 12 million TV viewers per game. Of course, soccer has not yet reached a level that might threaten gridiron — last year's Superbowl attracted about 111 million viewers and the NFL broadcast rights are worth nearly \$5 billion a year.

But the Premier League is well on the way to generating an income from global markets to match the NFL. From next season it will obtain about \$1.6 billion a year from domestic rights, and if the NBC contract is anything to go by, the total for overseas sales could match this, giving an average TV income for its 20 clubs equal to the NFL's 32 franchises. No wonder all those American owners bought into it.

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