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How to Begin Your Career in a Skilled Trade (and Why It's a Great Choice)

There's a common misconception in this country that the only path to a great career is through four or more years at a college. The fact is, this "traditional" path is only right for some people. There are plenty of high-paying, long-lasting careers available among the skilled trades like plumber, electrician, mechanic, construction foreman, and many more. Here's how to get started on one of these rewarding paths no matter your age or current employment situation.

Why a skilled trade?

The "skilled trades" can encompass hundreds of jobs - most of which involve learning to do something with your hands. These trades - from cook to car mechanic - often involve years of on-the-job training to master, and offer great rewards to those who pursue them. While it's true that "on average," those with a four year college degree earn more over the course of their lifetime than those with two years or fewer, the fact is - averages aren't the whole story.

"The problem with those averages is that people who work at RadioShack or Target get lumped in with master carpenters and electricians," [notes](#) a recent NPR piece. Statistics prove that for many fields, like electrician, the average income is thousands more than that of the average college grad.

Skilled trades are not only lucrative, but they are also job-secure. There are lots of jobs out there for qualified, certified people with a speciality skill. As NCSTrades.edu [notes](#), this is because they are always needed and beyond that, “there is never a shortage of unskilled or less motivated individuals that simply cannot perform the work of someone who has mastered their trade.”

So, how should I choose my trade?

The good news is that there are hundreds of skilled trades available to choose from. The bad news? That’s a lot of choice so be thoughtful in your approach in order to help [eliminate the anxiety](#) choosing a career can cause. It’s naive to not consider money when picking a skilled trade - but it can’t be the only factor you consider. This is going to be your career. So you have to ask yourself - *what do I like to do? What can I see myself doing for decades?* [Here](#) are some good tips for helping you decide.

How to get started

One option for those looking to pursue a career in skilled trade is to attend a trade school. The benefit of these is that you can often complete certification and acquire a specialized degree in a trade in a year or so. Financial aid is often available, but trade school does cost many people out of pocket. However, if you want to look into this, check [here](#).

Another good option is to try to secure an apprenticeship, which will allow you to work and make money while training - on the job, under the care of a professional. You can contact local skilled professionals and see if they are looking to hire any apprentices, or you can take [Zip Recruiter's advice](#) and contact local trade unions, employment services, and professional organizations. The US Department of Labor also offers [a program](#) to connect you with a network of over 150,000 employers looking to hire apprentices. There are more than 1,000 fields represented, so whichever skilled trade you choose is likely represented. Apprentices often make less money than professionals in the skilled trades, but it may work to your advantage as businesses may consider hiring apprentices even if they can’t take on a full-time professional at the time.

More and more workers - of all ages - are choosing to enter a skilled trade. If you want a job that is secure, well-paying, allows you to work with your hands, and gives you a special skill that not many others possess, this could be the right path for you.