

**EXCHANGE --- Class of 2019: How'd You Get That Job? --- Discovering joy is one thing. Finding gainful employment you love is another. Here's how five young workers advanced their careers.**

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Skywalker Sound Editor:

Seizing Opportunity

Qianbaihui Yang

Age: 32

Where: Skywalker Sound, San Francisco area

Education: Bachelor's in recording arts at Communication University of China; master's of fine arts in film and television production at USC

Qianbaihui Yang has pointed a microphone at a roaring, spitting jaguar, walked alongside biting camels and stood near a pack of playful, loud elephants -- all to capture realistic sound effects.

A sound editor at Skywalker Sound in Marin County, Calif., Ms. Yang edits dialogue between characters for film and TV and creates and synchronizes scene-specific sounds, such as tires spinning or sirens blaring. Most recently, she helped edit "Toy Story 4," due out in June. Here's her story, edited and condensed from a recent interview.

WSJ: What does a sound editor do?

A: It's really fun. Sound for film, when you break it down, there are so many subcategories. There's dialogue, there's sound effects, there's music. I'm lucky that I've gotten to work in different areas. I was a dialogue editor on certain films. I got to work on customized sound effects.

WSJ: What led you to Skywalker Sound?

A: In 2011, I got the chance to take a tour here. On the tour, I got to meet Randy Thom, the director of sound design. Afterward, he gave us each a business card and said keep in touch. When I got back to school, I wrote him an email to thank him. He replied immediately and said, 'Did you want to apply for my internship?' It was like, 'Whoa! Yes!' I came back to Skywalker for another interview, I got the internship and, basically, I stayed.

WSJ: What's your advice for someone who wants to work in this field?

A: If you find what your curiosity is, explore it. Growing up, I never knew I would do this. At one point, I wanted to study biology. I didn't really know what I would do, but I just kind of grabbed on what brought the most joy.

-- Chip Cutter

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Peloton Instructor:

Prep Before Leaping

Jess Sims

Age: 30

Where: Peloton, New York City

Title: Tread instructor

Time in the job: 7 months

Education: B.A. in Hispanic studies and psychology, Trinity College

Key skills: Strength training, high intensity interval training, running, coaching, fitness and nutrition, Instagram

Salary: Six figures with stock options

Jess Sims' job would give many people nightmares: It requires working out in front of thousands of people.

Ms. Sims is a fitness instructor for Peloton, the buzzed-about company selling exercise bikes and treadmills equipped with screens that stream live workout sessions from the firm's New York studios to people's home exercise equipment around the world.

Before landing in her current career, she was an educator who worked at schools from Houston to New York, inspired by a program called Teach for America, which aims to address educational inequality.

But she was never far from fitness. "Health and wellness were always really important to me," she says. "When I was in Houston, I coached two basketball teams, and when I was in New York, I brought in a yoga program."

The Wall Street Journal recently talked with Ms. Sims about her unexpected career path and why she loves it. Here's her story, edited and condensed.

WSJ: How did you wind up working with Peloton?

A: Growing up, I played every sport. I was captain of my soccer, basketball, and lacrosse teams in high school. In college, I double majored in Hispanic studies and psychology, and then I'll never forget: I saw this sign for Teach for America in the bathroom. I Googled it, and I was like, I'm doing that. I went down to Texas and taught fifth-grade math, and third-grade everything. I was also getting my master's in education.

WSJ: What drew you to education?

A: I'm half-black and half-white. I grew up upper-middle income, and I was really privileged for a lot of things. I use the term 'coming into my blackness' as an adult, because I really felt that was

such a huge part that was missing from my childhood, because I grew up in the town that was very heavily white. I was different and didn't understand my differences, but through basketball and sports, I started to have a lot more diversity. I just fell in love with that, and part of me wanted to give back.

WSJ: How'd you transition to Peloton?

A: When I was principal of Harlem Village Academies, in Harlem, N.Y., I started studying for my personal trainer certifications. I was going to the gym, networking, going to lots of different studios to see what kind of vibe I was interested in and what I wanted to coach. Another really big part of fitness is Instagram, so I started an account and started to post some workouts. For a while I coached boxing, and also coached at a high intensity interval training studio before joining Peloton.

WSJ: Apart from fitness certifications, what skills are needed for the job?

A: You have to be a good teacher. I think that's why it was so easy transition for me. People ask me, 'Do you miss teaching?' And I'm like, 'No, because I'm still teaching. I'm just in a different classroom.'

WSJ: What's hardest about your job?

A: People think I'm the most confident person ever, because how could I not be? I'm on camera, wearing a sports bra and leggings, talking for 60 minutes while running on a treadmill. But I try to humanize myself. I struggle with confidence issues, so I'll talk about that kind of thing. Or about how I have a dog, and how I have mom guilt when I leave her alone too long. The small things people can relate to. At first I was apprehensive, like, 'What if I mess up? What if I look silly?' But it's OK to stutter over your words, everyone does. If you're doing single leg deadlift and lose your balance, it humanizes you to people at home watching. If we never did anything wrong, they'd think, we can't achieve that.

WSJ: What's it like for people who want a fitness career?

A: Before Peloton, I was working seven days a week. I was teaching 30 classes a week and having private clients. When you're working for a boutique studio, you don't have paid time off or sick days. It was a really tough rollercoaster. Very few people have just one studio they work at. It's very hard on your voice, and your body. But Peloton is easily the best job you could have as a fitness instructor because we are treated like professional athletes. We get paid time off. We go to physical therapy every single week to prevent injuries.

WSJ: What advice do you have for people trying to make a hard career leap?

A: For me, I was like, listen. I'm only young once. I don't have kids. I'm not married. I saved a good amount of money, and money doesn't buy everything. It was just one of those things where I told myself, you have no other choice, Jess. You have to get out of your comfort zone. You have to do your research, and you have to plan. Even before I left my education job, I already had my personal-trainer certification. I'd already networked. I'd already figured out where I could see myself teaching. I didn't just quit my job and say, 'All right. What do I do now?'

-- Te-Ping Chen

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Talkspace Therapist:

Apps Open Markets

Alicia Winkle

Age: 31

Where: Pearl Behavioral Health Services and Talkspace, Madison, Ala.

Education: B.S. in psychology, M.A. in community counseling, Univ. of North Alabama

Salary: \$54,400 median, according to government statistics

Alicia Winkle is the epitome of the modern psychotherapist: She has a traditional therapy practice where she sees local patients at her office in Madison, Ala. -- as well as a virtual one where she can serve clients from all over Alabama, where she has her license.

Mental-health services today can be just a text message away, with thousands of people currently receiving psychotherapy services every month via text or video chat through Talkspace, one of a crop of apps that match clients with licensed therapists for everything from marriage counseling to help with anxiety and major depressive disorder.

The app has given the 31-year-old access to a pool of potential clients she says she wouldn't have if she saw clients only in-person. Here's Ms. Winkle's story, edited and condensed from a recent interview.

WSJ: Why did you decide to become a therapist?

A: I went to college determined to be a nurse practitioner, but I started having severe anxiety. I had to drop out. I'd seen someone have a panic attack and I'd thought, 'Oh goodness, she's really overdoing it, she needs to calm down.' Then it happened to me and I understood the torment it was. I went to therapy. I got some specialized treatment. After that, I felt like I could relate to people on a different level. Once I got a better handle on my panic attacks, I returned to school and switched to studying psychology.

WSJ: What was your first job out of college?

A: My best friend lives in Orlando, Fla., and her roommate was [on a military deployment] so she asked me to come and live with her. I did in-home sales for Sears, selling countertops, new cabinets, HVAC. I'd get appointments every morning, take my computer and go out and do my pitch. I was making really good money, but I was miserable because I wasn't helping anyone.

I applied for any job I could find in the mental-health field. I ended up working as a live-in counselor at a boarding school in Siler City, N.C., for adolescent girls with mental-health issues.

WSJ: What did you learn from that job?

A: It was life-changing. I was very humbled by it. One of the girls cursed me out one day and said that I didn't respect her and that until I showed them respect, I couldn't ever reach them. I

realized she was right. I was trying to hold boundaries, when in reality I was missing the point. It wasn't always about the rules and regulations. They needed to connect with me.

WSJ: What's your career path been since then?

A: I came back to Alabama for my master's degree for the in-state tuition and to be closer to my family. To get my license, I needed to do 3,000 hours of clinical work. I didn't sleep a lot during that period. I worked with registered sex offenders, did screening at the emergency room of a local hospital. Later I worked in a day-treatment center for adults with serious mental illness, like schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, and I did school-based counseling in city and county schools.

In 2015, I was really wanting to open a private practice and my boss at the time sent me a link. She said, 'It looks like you could do this.' I clicked on it and it was Talkspace. I hadn't heard of it. My first impression was, 'Can I even do this with my license?' I filled out the contact form and thought I'd just be getting more information, but I was actually applying and didn't know it.

Now I have a private practice here in Madison, where I see clients on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. And every day, I do Talkspace, and I can respond to messages from the park or my patio, or while I'm traveling. I've had anywhere from five clients to 36 or 37. [Talkspace requires therapists to write back to clients one to two times per day.]

-- Lauren Weber

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Varsity Accountant:

Passion and Profession

Jordan Olson

Age: 27

Where: Varsity Spirit LLC, Memphis, Tenn.

Title: Divisional controller

Time in the job: 20 months

Education: BA and MA in accounting, University of Alabama

Key skills: Cheerleading, financial reporting, analytics, accounting, Excel

Salary: \$65,000 to \$85,000

Cheerleading and accounting might seem an unlikely mix, but they've added up well for Jordan Olson.

Mr. Olson, who grew up in a small town outside of Montgomery, Ala., was able to parlay his affinity for cheerleading into a college scholarship and ultimately into his career path.

"Male cheerleading wasn't very popular, especially in the South. But my high school was

different," he says. "A lot of us played football together, and a lot of us guys would try out for the cheerleading team. . . . I liked the challenge, and it taught me a lot about being disciplined and understanding that you have to be patient -- and you have to put in the work to achieve your goal."

Mr. Olson -- who recently began working as a controller at Varsity Spirit LLC, which runs cheerleading camps, produces cheerleading apparel and also holds cheerleading competitions -- talked with The Wall Street Journal about his unusual career path and why financial analysis might have more of a connection to cheerleading than it would seem on the surface. Here's his story, edited and condensed from a recent interview.

WSJ: You went to college on a cheerleading scholarship. What made you choose accounting?

A: I was good with the numbers, and I liked the challenge of digging into the details. In my undergrad studies, I had to take an accounting 101 course, and did fairly well in it. And my professor said I should probably take up accounting because the job market is good. Accountants are needed in the world.

WSJ: What makes the company culture different?

A: The majority of the people here have been on a cheerleading team at some point in their life. They know what it's like to be a team player. We build each other up at all times. It's not like you just go into a room or to your desk and just sit there for your eight hours. It's very lively.

WSJ: What would you advise people looking to marry their passions with a day-to-day career?

A: Always be passionate, be disciplined, be prepared. You've got to be passionate about what you do, but you've got to be disciplined in everything you do. You can't be afraid of the work. And you have to be prepared to capitalize on every opportunity when they present themselves.

WSJ: Do you ever get to cheer these days?

A: I do not. I hung up my megaphone. But I'm still relatively involved with the University of Alabama cheerleading squad, advising. And finance is a support function of the business, and that's kind of what cheerleaders are. When I think about it, I've been a part of cheerleading for about 13 years. I supported everything from football to women's volleyball to gymnastics. When you're cheerleading, you're a supporter. You're getting people engaged, and that's what I'm doing with finance. I'm using that to support my people and giving them the information that they need to be successful.

-- Te-Ping Chen

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Cashing In on Cannabis:

Bookkeeping for Startups

Naomi Granger

Age: 38

Where: Dope CFO, Las Vegas

Education: B.A. in accounting and M.B.A., Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University

Salary: Ms. Granger says her pay can range from \$5,000 to \$30,000 a month, depending on sales volume

Naomi Granger ditched her desk job and launched Dope CFO in late 2017, a freelance accounting practice that helps marijuana startups and provides training for other bookkeepers serving the cannabis industry.

"I enjoyed my work, but I was tired of going into the office and sitting in a cubicle every day," says Ms. Granger. "After 12 years in public accounting, I didn't feel like what I was doing was meaningful anymore."

Ms. Granger has expanded the focus of the business from primarily doing accounting for startups to training other bookkeepers for work in the industry. After living and working around the country for years with firms like PricewaterhouseCoopers, Ms. Granger is now living in her hometown of Las Vegas, where marijuana has been legal since 2017. Here's Ms. Granger's story, edited and condensed from a recent interview.

WSJ: Is accounting different when you're working with pot dispensaries as clients?

A: A lot of these business owners have been operating in black markets for decades. Now that they have the opportunity to do business legally, many are struggling to adjust because they've done things their own way for so long.

You might be working with a client and notice a \$25,000 transaction with no paperwork or information attached. You have to tell them, listen, we can't book sales without a receipt. And if they say they've always done it that way, you're the one who's got to say, 'No, not anymore.'

Cannabis is also subject to a special tax code, which means businesses can't write off operating expenses, only their costs for goods sold. That means they have these huge tax bills. Big expenses like payroll and rent can't be written off, because the federal government classifies marijuana as an illicit substance.

WSJ: What were the key steps to finding your specialization?

A: As an accountant, you have a skill set that allows you to work with all kinds of businesses. But if you go to the local chiropractor or hairdresser to offer your services, you might get paid \$300 or \$400 a month max to do their accounting. No one can live off \$400 a month, so you need 10 or 20 clients to make a good living, which is a lot to balance.

I came across other classes and programs run by people like me who had worked in public accounting and left to start their own firms. Their advice was to find a niche. I picked professional athletes at first. The ones who were actively playing seemed to be bombarded by different financial advisers.

Then I decided to try real estate because I already knew a few agents, but realized most didn't make enough money to hire an accountant.

That's when I stumbled upon cannabis. It's such an underserved industry, facing these huge problems because of the changing laws and massive growth. Most banks won't serve cannabis companies, and large accounting firms and accounting software providers don't want to serve the industry, either, because it's still an illegal business, federally speaking.

WSJ: What's your favorite part of the job?

A: We're getting to see all of these business owners fight for a chance to thrive. It feels like we're part of a movement.

-- Kelsey Gee