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JIM: Welcome. We’ve got a great show today and we have a special guest. As a matter of fact, it’s somebody I’ve known since I was like 3 or 4 years old. His father delivered me when I was a baby and he lived right behind my grandparents and, right now, he is an instructor, a job placement coordinator for South Coast College in Southern California, and he also does a lot of advising on interviewing and I thought with a lot of people that I’m talking to who have young people that are trying to figure out their career path, a lot of them just don’t know which way to turn and then I’ve also got a lot of clients who are finding themselves rebooting and maybe trying a different career and, based on Tom Sinski’s, who is my guest today, experience, he has a lot of experience in this helping people with career changes as well as advising people that are maybe looking for that first job. Welcome, Tom.

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TOM SINSKI: Thanks. Thanks for having me on.

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JIM: Give us a little bit of your background. I mean you’ve done a lot of things. I know when we graduated from high school together, you were off to I think eventually planning on going to law school but that’s taken you a lot of different paths. I just happened to come across some of the stuff that you are doing. I know even just with court reporting, I never would have thought of court reporting as something that might be necessary anymore with technology but you had commented there’s actually a shortage, right now, and real opportunities for people in that field.

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TOM SINSKI: Yeah. Our school at South Coast College trains court reporters. That’s what we’re mostly known for. We also train paralegals and I teach them some legal terminology and we train medical assistants, that’s kind of our non-legal thing, and we train legal administrative assistants but court reporting is like, I’m permitted to say it’s by far our coolest program. Many of our grads make over six-figure incomes and the reason is because not many people can do it. To be a certified court reporter, you’ve got to write, they don’t call it typing, at 225 words a minute, which isn’t like typing. It’s like more playing piano. Sometimes they’re hitting three or five keys at once so it doesn’t look like they’re going that fast but they are and they also transcribe TV shows. One of our graduates, her company covered the Oscars. Another one went to the State of the Union and she’s sitting in front of the President, before Congress, so they do a variety of things and they do get compensated well because not many people can do it. I know some people think that technology is going to replace it really quickly but they’ve been saying that for 30 years. The graduates do get scooped up right away in that field, more than our other programs.

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JIM: So it is a terrific opportunity for someone considering a career change and I just look at my son is almost in a related field and I can’t believe it hasn’t been replaced. He works for a company which helps with phone calls for the hearing impaired so even though they have the technology that is picking up the voices and putting words to it, his job is still to edit it and make sure that those words are correct. I know when I talk into my phone to send an email message or whatever, I’m constantly re-reading and editing it and I just would think well maybe it’s just because the technology in my phone isn’t up to par but I think from what you’re saying, even with something as important as court reporting or transcription, it really is something that technology as yet to catch up with.

3:04

TOM SINSKI: Yeah. You’re from Wisconsin so if you saw in Wisconsin within the NCAA Final, there was a court reporter in the room because a lot of sports teams and golfers and NBA teams, they have a court reporter in there to transcribe the interview to make sure that they’re not misquoted so it’s pretty important stuff they do. We don’t really know when certain jobs are going to be replaced or it. Sometimes there are court reporters at a deposition. They’re interviewing someone before the trial to see if they’re a good witness, to get information. Sometimes the court reporter is the highest paid person in the room. Of course, people at big law firms are making a lot more but it’s a neat gig. They cover murder trials and they say that after you do it for about three or four years, they enter this zone where they can just sit there and the words kind of flow through them. They can even think about other things while they’re doing it.

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JIM: That’s just incredible. When you look at that as a career, what is the type of person that might find that as a rewarding career and enjoy it because I’ve heard some people say, man, I could never do that because it sounds monotonous or whatever but what is the type of person that for someone maybe considering a career change, what’s involved in getting into that or, if you’ve got a young person that’s looking to make a career out of it, what would you say would be the basic ingredients for it to be a successful choice?

TOM SINSKI: For that, I would say motivation. We produce more court reporters I believe than any school in California, which is only about 24 a year, but the ones who do it, they tend to be really self-motivated. It usually takes two to three years to learn how to do it but, every year, it seems like we have about two or three who have done it in about 13 months so they’re the ones who spend a lot of time at the school and they’re just practicing getting faster and faster. We do these speed classes and has four teachers in front of the room reading a court transcript and they’re just writing it down and they’re read at different speeds. It’s funny because you leave the class thinking at that speed it’s like you can’t help but walk out of the class and think I am now walking to my car. There is the gray cat. I mean, they’re read at really exact speed and it’s fun because they’re murder trials so they’re kind of fun classes to do because I might find myself playing a criminal saying I told him, if you get up in my face, I’m going to cut you, and you know you read it and it’s kind of fun.

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JIM: Yeah. Well, that’s really interesting. This program isn’t about people becoming a court reporter necessarily but it’s for people that are thinking about a career change or what career to get into. I know with my kids, I mean they’re just lost, and a lot of times there’s not a lot of guidance as to where the opportunities are and you’re talking about a potential six-figure income. I mean people could live pretty comfortably with that if they just apply themselves and you look at something like that, if someone can finish a curriculum like that in 13 months or up to three years, I’ve got to believe, as far as career choices going, the amount of money you have to spend on education versus what you get back out of it, that’s got to be a pretty good payback compared to a lot of careers out that.

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TOM SINSKI: Yeah, it is. Even compared to the other careers we do at our own school. I get to do some recruiting at high school college fairs and career fairs and, if they get into a good four-year school, I’m thinking go for that, college is really fun, but for some people who don’t want to go to a good four-year college or get into a great program like engineering, which has a lot of potential, consider ours, too. Consider other options. It is funny how you don’t really know which jobs pay well. I had no idea that pharmacists can make $120,000 to $150,000 a year, certainly in Southern California, so it’s just kind of fun that this little niche of court reporting where they can make a lot of money. You want to find out what’s going on in your area, you want to make connections. If you’re looking at a court reporting school, make sure you find out how many reporters does that school produce a year because some places have court reporting programs but they might have one person get through it a year. There’s one in Southern California that even has fewer than that so I mean you want to find out the success rate at the school.

6:28

JIM: That’s incredible. I know when my kids were picking their career path, they just kind of follow the crowd or what their friends doing, let’s take a couple of classes there, but taking a little time to really investigate and look at it. I mean you’re investing your time and it amazes me how many young people today go to college to go to college, it’s not to gain a career, and I think if you just change that mindset a little bit and invest a little bit of extra time to find out what the results will be if you apply yourself and what you need to do, I think you’re going to be a lot more successful and you’ll probably not build up as much of that student loan debt. You see a lot of those kids, they switch careers three or four times and it’s on borrowed money. That can be problematic to your future financial wellbeing so let’s take a quick break. When we come back, one thing I’m really interested in, and we’re saving the best for last, in my opinion, you do a game show that helps people on the interviewing process and I think that’s going to be very interesting for our listeners so please stay tuned.

7:25

BREAK

8:29

JIM: Welcome back as we continue to visit with Tom Sinski, who is an instructor and job placement coordinator for South Coast College. I know you’ve had a career that spanned a lot of different things that you’ve done from being an attorney, you’ve been adjunct professor, you’ve been a high school teacher, but I think if we boil it all down to it, you’re a real teacher at heart making a difference in people’s lives, right?

8:51

TOM SINSKI: Well, I like to think so, thanks.

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JIM: Let’s talk about you’ve tried to make the interviewing process fun. I think it’s something that creates a lot of stress. I think people break into a sweat and people don’t normally enjoy the interviewing process and I know speaking as an employer who’s gone through the interviewing process from a hiring standpoint, I know I don’t enjoy it. What have you done to make that fun and what recommendations would you have for somebody because we’ve got a lot of clients that maybe have been in the same job for 20 years and, because of downsizing or shifts in the business world, they find themselves looking for that new career or job change, and they may not have done an interview for 20 years to the kid just graduating from college and they might be going to their first job interview, tell us about this game that you’ve created.

9:38

TOM SINSKI: Okay. The interviewing game show, it’s informal, anyone can do it. You don’t need any materials for it. Go online. Find the 25 to 30 most frequently asked questions at interviews maybe geared toward what your student needs are and just get them in large groups before and then have the winner of each group compete in the end with a group of three or four who are going for the championship and you just ask them each about two or three questions. They get to answer them and then you sort of judge as a group. You get some grownups there to see like who provided the best answers. I like to throw in one or two fun questions, too. Every once in a while, an interviewer will ask that oddball question like, if you could be any animal, what would you be, and then you can do some of the classics, too, like the annoying what would you say is your biggest weakness, and I always tell students to pause dramatically, look them right in the eye sincerely and say kryptonite. There’s the biggest weakness in strength questions so go over the classic questions. There’s some good stuff on You Tube, interviewing samples. They go through the questions you’re might likely to ask so preparation is important for interviewing. I think enthusiasm is maybe the most important thing but not bordering on desperation. I think interviewing is kind of like dating where desperation is really unappealing, so you want to be enthusiastic, confident. I also think it’s a numbers game, too, in that not everybody is going to like you. I find when I interview, about four out of five people like me, one out of five just can’t stand me, so if they’re interviewing 10 people, I don’t want to be in the middle of the pack. I am going to be kind of outgoing and just really going for it and they might just hate me but I’m not going to bore them through my interview. They’re either going to want me or just really reject me.

11:05

JIM: And I think you said several points that are almost universal in just about anything you do. I mean, I don’t know if you’re a Green Bay Packer fan growing up in Wisconsin, I’m diehard on that, and for the logic behind it, I can’t figure out but you look at Aaron Rogers, last year’s MVP, and one thing that everybody says about Aaron is how prepared he is. All of the game film he looks at, everything. He doesn’t take a step without making sure where that step is going and whether you’re playing football or whether you’re going to take a college exam or you’re going to do a job interview, being prepared is really something that’s really important and I know you talk about enthusiasm, being excited, and not take yourself too seriously or in this job interview. You’ve got to look at it as a numbers game. That’s true of just about anything because especially in today’s job market where lots of people are looking for different positions, you’ve got to set yourself apart and it might take five, six, seven different interviews but the right person always seems to land on their feet if they do the preparation and they’re ready for it and they persevere.

12:09

TOM SINSKI: When you mention preparing for it, research the company, learn about the company you’re interviewing with, and they might ask at the end, do you have any questions for us. That’s a good thing. Sometimes we prepare students to do externships and I always tell them to ask, if an extern is outstanding, is there any chance you might hire that person for a fulltime job? That’s kind of a good one to show your enthusiasm and, also, this is probably a little bit off track, but I want to get this out there at some point. Keep in mind that, today, a lot of part-time jobs can lead to fulltime jobs. If you get in there as a part-time job and you do a great, performance is excellent, they might move you up to fulltime so don’t rule out part-time jobs.

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JIM: I’ve just came from a class that I took and they talked about having statements of understanding. Do you think this would be valid, if you’re looking to start a job that you say, hey, look, is there is a possibility for part-time going to fulltime and, if so, what kind of things can I do to get there? I’ve heard it said, you write that stuff down and, if they accept you in the position or they bring you back for a second interview and they’re ready to offer you a position, now, you can go back to, well, during the interview, you said this was possible. Is this still the way it is and reconfirm that. I find some people might look at that and say, well, geez, that’s being a little bold but, I’ll tell you what, if you’ve taken the time and interest to take those notes down and you’re repeating back and forth and making sure that communication of expectations is very clear, I think your chances of not being disappointed have just dropped dramatically. Would you agree with that?

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TOM SINSKI: Yeah. You want to find out if you can move up. They want to find out that you are someone who wants to climb up. Unless the person is really insecure, in which case you might not want to work for them anyway, you want to show that you’re someone who wants to advance and that you’re going to be someone who’s going to work hard. Also, when you’re interviewing, focus on the interviewer, too, not just the company. One time, I had an interview and I walked in and the guy had two pictures of himself whitewater rafting. I said, oh, you like whitewater rafting. He spent most of the interview talking about that and he loved me and wanted to hire me. Another guy I work with is a huge sports fan, he could talk about any sport, any team, and he saw this guy liked this one team. Oh, Oakland Raiders fan, and the guy spent have the interview talking about the Oakland Raiders and then, at the end, wanted to hire him. He thought this guy was a fan so also focus on the person interviewing you and the company you’re interviewing with while you’re selling yourself, too.

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JIM: Well, I know I’ve done interviews in the past where the first question I get asked is what benefits do you have and how many vacation days do I get.

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TOM SINSKI: Oh, yeah.

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JIM: Probably not the best first question.

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TOM SINSKI: No, big mistake. Another thing I would say, put a little bit of your quirkiness maybe on your resume. The thing I always get the most comments on my resume is that I would say, despite three graduate degrees, I would say Disneyland Jungle Cruise guide, and I recently got to speak at our school’s graduation and they introduced that and that’s what always gets the most reaction. Little things here and there just to stand out as an individual to show your interest.

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JIM: That’s awesome. Any other thoughts or things that you want to talk about your school?

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TOM SINSKI: A couple. Before the show, we were talking about generational differences and I would encourage those under 25, put away your cellphone when you’re interviewing. Make sure it is turned off. There are generation considerations and, for those of us who are over 40 or 50, keep in mind they’re not always wasting your time. I have a colleague here who’s half my age, and I told you this before. We were driving around looking for medical offices in the area and he was on his phone and I pulled over. So, are you going to just text your friends or are you going to help me look? He was like, dude, and he showed me he was looking for medical offices on his phone so I mean the young people really do use their phones, they’re like an extension of their brain, but just be aware with older people, it can seem kind of rude if you’re on your phone when you should be giving someone else your full attention or when you should look nervously ready for an interview.

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JIM: You want to think outwardly, not inwardly, and that can go a million miles regardless of what you’re doing. The last thing I just want to bring up, you talked about there’s all this opportunity in court reporting and you said you’re a recruiter for your school so, if somebody wanted to find out more about it and what South Coast College offers, how would they find information about that?

15:50

TOM SINSKI: Well, Google the best court reporting schools, we’ll come up. Look up court reporting. We’re only in orange. The last school I taught at was an internet school. It was also one of the best schools in the country but I was on the internet side so I talked to students from all over the country at the same time. It was kind of like the Brady Bunch when you could have all of these video screens up there and so I would have students from Seattle, New York, Las Vegas, Texas, Florida, Ohio. We were teaching a class online and it was really fun but I do like the live classes. They sort of went more asynchronous, which means you’re more posting assignments and grading them. The school I’m at now, it’s all at one location so we have nothing but live classes. See what you’re learning style is, what you would prefer. Look at the success rate of the school and look what others say about the success rate. Don’t just trust what the school says. Compare different programs.

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JIM: Awesome. Well, thanks a lot, Tom. I really appreciate you joining us.

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TOM SINSKI: Thanks for having me on.

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JIM: I think, hopefully, our audience got a lot out of this and I hope that most people got out of this, again, we’re not talking about court reporting as something everybody should jump into but there’s a lot of career choices out there similar to court reporting. I know we’ve had Owen Sullivan on who is the past senior executives at Manpower and they were talking about not being able to fill welding positions at some of the manufacturing companies in our area and there are a lot of career opportunities out there and if you just take a little time to research and figure out what those are and how that career change could benefit you in the long run and then take that next step and be prepared when you interview, I think you’ll enjoy a lot of success in your future so thanks, Tom.

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TOM SINSKI: Thank you.

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JIM: Thanks for joining us this week and tune in again next week as we explore another phase of the Real Wealth process and, remember, if anything you heard in today’s show you’d like to get more information about, contact your Real Wealth advisor. Also, if you feel that any of this information would be helpful to a friend or family member, just click the Forward to a Friend button.