

Harper Talks, Episode 3: Joe McEnery

[00:00:03.460] - Brian Shelton, host

I'm Brian Shelton, and you're listening to Harper Talks, a co-production of Harper College Alumni Relations and WHCM. A common theme over the short life of this podcast is that our guests came to Harper College to either find their calling or make their calling a reality. Joe McEnery is no different. Joe had been a student at Harper, went on to get his bachelor's degree in education and returned to Harper for continuing education. That was when he realized that his calling to help people may not lie in education but in another line of public service work.

[00:00:41.620] - Brian Shelton, host

Joe joined me for Harper talks over Zoom.

[00:00:45.160] - Brian Shelton, host

Hey, Joe, thanks for being here with us today. How are you doing?

[00:00:48.310] - Joe McEnery

Doing great. Thanks for having me. Yeah, it's great.

[00:00:50.680] - Brian Shelton, host

Great to have you on the show today when we're recording this. It is a slightly sunny day in the middle of December, so it's nice to actually get some decent weather here. So. So, Joe, you came to Harper College fresh out of high school and got your associate's degree and then you went on to Illinois State to major in education.

[00:01:09.250] - Brian Shelton, host

I'm just curious, what was your time at Harper College like when you were a student?

[00:01:13.220] - Brian Shelton, host

Were things like at Harper during that time?

[00:01:15.730] - Joe McEnery

Well, it was a while ago, that's for sure. The Harper was a lot smaller than the campus exploded and grown. The programs certainly probably doubled in size since I was there. But the decision to go to Harper was probably based simply on the fact that at the time, right out of high school, I didn't know what

I wanted to do. It took so many classes trying to just qualify for college. That didn't give you a lot of time to really explore some of the options and opportunities that were going to present you in the world.

[00:01:45.620] - Joe McEnergy

So that was kind of my main decision. Since I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do, it would be hard to pick a four year school with a reputation good on a major that you're interested in until you know that major.

[00:01:57.490] - Brian Shelton, host

Yeah, I think a lot of students have that problem. I see it happen all the time because I teach at the college and I see students, they leave right out of high school. They go to a four year university and then they don't do so well the first semester. And then they come back to Harper and they're like, gee, I wish I had started here and done this from the beginning.

[00:02:16.730] - Joe McEnergy

Oh, yeah. I'd say we saw quite a bit of that too. It was, you know, whether you're ready to go away or not, you know, if you think you're mature enough to handle the time away, a lot of kids do well, but a lot of kids struggle because it's the first time they're really kind of out on their own.

[00:02:30.610] - Brian Shelton, host

Yeah, I know. I know. I certainly struggled the first year of college. It was certainly it was certainly difficult. So what did you do while you're at Harper? What was fun when you were a student there?

[00:02:42.280] - Joe McEnergy

Mainly at the time I was. I was working at the water park in Elk Grove, working for the park district. And then I spent my first year I had swam during high school, started late swimming in high school. So then I did swim for the swim team for one year until unfortunately I had some issues with my shoulder and it kind of sidelined me and kind of took me out of out of competing. So but, you know, just a lot of opportunities to be around campus and with the with being a commuter campus, you always had those little gaps in between.

[00:03:17.710] - Joe McEnergy

So it kind of gave you a chance to to hang out and get to know people and and be involved and mainly through the swim team in sports. I worked in the athletic office a little bit, too, and it was just a nice way to connect to campus and make it feel a little more homey and not quite so much of a kind of a chore where it's got to go to school, got to go home, got to go to school, got to go home.

[00:03:40.900] - Joe McEnergy

You start spending a little more time on campus with people and it makes it a little more like when you go away to school.

[00:03:48.100] - Brian Shelton, host

Yeah. I think that's a mistake that a lot of people make is that they just come to classes and go home. And the more involved you get, the better experience you get, that's for sure, while you're there. So you are back in building M back in the in the in the old days when it was boy, I don't want to be so negative but rather prisonlike now it's quite beautiful. Have you seen the new building M.

[00:04:07.640] - Joe McEnergy

Yes, I was thrilled when I came through for the, the earlier interviews and such. But yes, I would say maybe industrial was a good word.

[00:04:15.910] - Joe McEnergy

Spartan

[00:04:16.600] - Brian Shelton, host

industrial. Yeah.

[00:04:18.220] - Joe McEnergy

It's we've been back for they they hosted several events for the kids like my daughter competed in a gymnastics competition for USA that was held at Harpur for several years. And it was it was nice to come back. You knew where everything was. And it was really rather impressive what they had accomplished. Yeah.

[00:04:37.130] - Brian Shelton, host

My our producer, Shannon Hynes and the alumni office, she might not like me saying this, but she says they like to hold alumni events and building a the student center because it's the only building that hasn't been remodeled on campus. So alumni always feel at home when they go there.

[00:04:50.770] - Joe McEnergy

I'm sure it's on the list of things that need to get done next. So.

[00:04:54.970] - Brian Shelton, host

So. What was Illinois State like for you? I mean, did you feel like Harper prepared you for your experience transferring to the four year school and kind of leaving the nest of home a little bit?

[00:05:08.940] - Joe McEnery

That first semester down there was was a little tricky. Got to manage your time differently. Again, I was I worked all the way through school anywhere from 20 hours a week. My last years I was actually working 40 hours a week and going to school. So it was always a little busy, but just the. That little bit of growing up you need to do where, you know, it's like, oh, I've got time to do this, I got time to do that, and I'll suddenly realize, yeah, you don't have time to do that.

[00:05:36.590] - Joe McEnery

So you learn to plan your time pretty well and you learn to work ahead. The first semester was was OK, but not my best. After that, you learned that if you get ahead on papers, get ahead on projects and then go talk to your professor. When you become a person on a bigger campus versus a body sitting in a desk, you get a lot more help and a lot more guidance, I would say. And you turn in a paper early and the professor says, well, right now it's an A minus if you want to work on these three or four things.

[00:06:12.410] - Joe McEnery

OK, well, I can work on that or I can turn it in and be done. So you kind of learn to get things ahead. My favorite semester was probably my last full year on campus before student teaching when I had all all papers and projects turned in by midterm. And then I was able to pretty much just roll right through finals at the end of the semester with no stress and relaxed. And you know that working hard early and not putting things off really, really paid off.

[00:06:40.070] - Joe McEnery

And that's kind of how how I live my life. Now, obviously, when we log down for the interview today, I was there a half hour early.

[00:06:47.480] - Brian Shelton, host

So I always say that the on time is 15 minutes late. So, yeah.

[00:06:53.810] - Brian Shelton, host

So you majored in education when you went to Illinois State. You mentioned your student teaching experience. What was what was teaching like? Obviously, that's not what you're doing now. So something change, something wasn't quite working for you. But how was your experience teaching?

[00:07:07.910] - Joe McEnery

A few things changed. I finished up at ISU, came home. I actually student taught in Schaumburg, and then I was hired as a midyear replacement for a teacher on maternity leave who then was not coming back. And I taught in Wheeling for about four years. And as I started taking classes, I actually came back to Harper and picked up a science class so that I could be certified to teach science. I was teaching eighth grade at the time.

[00:07:37.460] - Joe McEnery

Just made me a little more marketable because at the time I could teach English and history and then with one more class, I could teach science. I changed majors. Several times while I was at Harper, so I had I was a little science heavy for the eventual history degree that I was picked up at ISU, so but so I was back to Harper for a science class and then started working on my masters to be a school principal. And as I kind of dug into those classes, I realized that that was really not where I wanted to go with my life.

[00:08:18.410] - Joe McEnery

You see how often the principals of schools are there. They're there early. They're they're very late. They're at board meetings. They're at PTA meetings, they're at school. And at the time, we were looking to have a family and I was kind of looking at it going, I don't think I want to be gone quite that much. So a friend of mine had come out to help with I was coaching volleyball and he was a college volleyball player and came out to help me with tryouts.

[00:08:46.160] - Joe McEnery

And he mentioned that Elk Grove Village was testing for the fire department again. And I should maybe check it out one more time. I tested a couple of times during college, but the the lists weren't moving at the time and. I said, all right, let's go check it out, and he and I took that test and we actually both got hired together, so it was just the path presents itself. You take the opportunity and it's amazing how things work out.

[00:09:12.730] - Brian Shelton, host

Yes, I think that's great advice in particular to our students who might be listening, that sometimes you've got to take a chance on what you know, follow what it is you're really after rather than what it is you think you're after. I don't know if that makes any sense or not, but sometimes we get ourselves wrapped into a predetermined path for ourselves. And if we don't take opportunities as they present them, we may miss out

[00:09:34.880] - Joe McEnery

Exactly. Your early years are guided, hopefully in a positive direction by your parents. And you kind of I don't say get pigeonholed, but you get to a point where it's like, this is what I'm expected to do. This is what I have to do. Well, I went to I went to college to be a teacher and I spent all that money. Now I'm going to switch and be a fireman.

[00:09:58.870] - Joe McEnergy

And to be honest, I was almost a little afraid to go tell my mom, you know, I was twenty five at the time. And yet I was like, I'm going to go tell my mom I'm switching careers. So it was it was a little strange to think of it that way at the time, but she was very supportive of it. And my degree is actually, even though I'm not teaching in the traditional classroom school setting anymore, so much of my job is teaching, whether it's teaching and training recruits, teaching new material to veteran firefighters, teaching new ideas, teaching to the public.

[00:10:37.750] - Joe McEnergy

We do a great deal of public education or I've even taught a few classes and, you know, filled in Northwest community for the paramedic program. Or they would have you teach skills. I did that before my kids were born and we'll probably look into going back now that they're off to high school and college. Those opportunities will maybe be looked into once again.

[00:10:59.290] - Brian Shelton, host

Yeah. Being able to instruct people and get them to to understand how to do something and how something works is always a valuable skill that kind of never goes away. So I was curious, what was it like taking the firefighters test? I mean, you know, as a layperson, I see things on TV and movies and things like that. Is it as difficult as as it's made out to be?

[00:11:21.160] - Joe McEnergy

When I took its a little bit different than they do now. So for the people that are checking out the fire science program at Harper, this information is a little bit dated. But at the time, each department ran their own physical ability test, whereas now they had the CPAC program where you only have to take that physical test once and you get a little certificate that says you've passed. So that way you don't have to take it every single you know, you would be taking it every single weekend for a different department.

[00:11:47.650] - Joe McEnergy

They consolidated it up at at NIPSTA so that you only have to take it once a year and then your certificates good for a year.

[00:11:55.450] - Joe McEnergy

But the physical parts of the of the job are. I would say demanding, but they're not insurmountable, I mean, I was you know, I swam in high school and college, so I was in pretty good shape. I've put on a bit more muscle over the years just but the nature of the job. But the testing program was there was a written test, there were interviews and then the physical test.

[00:12:20.090] - Joe McEnergy

So I would say, all in all, if you've been through a semester of finals at Harper, it's no less stressful than that.

[00:12:27.890] - Brian Shelton, host

So, you know, you've had a long, distinguished career as a firefighter in our community. And I want to talk about that. But it seems like to me the common theme running through your life is that public service was at your heart.

[00:12:42.560] - Brian Shelton, host

I mean, you wanted to be a teacher, which is a public service. Some people don't think of it that way. And then you move to being a firefighter. And I'm just curious, what is it inside of you that that that makes that happen? Why is that you're so interested in that?

[00:12:55.580] - Joe McEnergy

Honestly, I'm not sure it is, but it did kind of become a running theme. I actually started working for the Elk Grove Park District at 14 in the aquatics programs. I started as a pool attendant in the cashier, went up to a lifeguard and then became the senior guard manager, trainer, instructor for lifeguarding and CPR and facilities manager until I went away to ISU. And then I coached in there also. But it just. You find where where you're comfortable and what you like to do, and that just kind of directs where you end up working as you go along.

[00:13:37.350] - Joe McEnergy

I mean, I had other jobs at ISU. I worked at a restaurant for a semester. I knew I wanted nothing to do with that. But I've done other things. I've worked building maintenance. I've worked minor construction like like construction, renovating, demolition, work on the side as things came up. And I do enjoy the Hands-On part of it.

[00:13:59.430] - Joe McEnergy

And I guess the biggest part of all the jobs that I had, I was never behind a desk all day long. And it was I was up, I was active. I was with people. And the idea of grinding away at a desk, you know, writing code or that kind of thing just wasn't something that ever appealed to me.

[00:14:19.320] - Brian Shelton, host

Yeah, I can definitely identify with that. It's one of the things that I love about teaching at the college is that every day is different. No two days are alike. And so that makes the job much more interesting. I was thinking about the public service aspect and I was thinking about as a kid, it seemed like everyone wanted to be a police officer or a firefighter when I was a kid growing up.

[00:14:41.880] - Brian Shelton, host

And I don't know that I see that so much today.

[00:14:45.750] - Brian Shelton, host

What do you think of that? Do you see that? Do you see a lot of young people coming in and saying, yes, I want to be a firefighter, this is something I'm interested in? Or do you feel like maybe the idea of that in the public service aspect of that has dropped off a bit in the last few years?

[00:15:00.180] - Joe McEnery

I would say it has changed mainly the I think I think kids today. This is going to sound like an old man, but too much time on their phone and too much independent work and independent time, you know, you have kids that are on teams and sports, you see a distinct difference between people who are involved in activities with large groups versus small groups.

[00:15:25.200] - Joe McEnery

Most of our recruits and newer hires were in those activities. And it was just the idea of of being part of taking care of other people and reaching out. It seems to have changed a little bit. I say the unfortunate political climate has really hurt the police side of things. The police officers that I know and I actually come from a police family. I was the first one to break and go to the fire department. You just they're great people.

[00:15:57.830] - Joe McEnery

And it's the handful of bad, bad, single incidences that get blown up on social media. And it gives the whole the whole police family or the whole fire family a bad name. We say at work it's you know, everything you do from now on will be watched. You are no longer a citizen, commits a crime. It's firefighter commits crime or firefighter does this. And it seems to get get run out pretty well. But I would say that the you know, the little kids still love seeing us drive through town and we get lots of little waves and they get excited and jump up and down.

[00:16:37.700] - Joe McEnergy

And that's usually the best part of my day. You know, you see these little kids that are excited to see you because for the most part, police and fire see people on their worst day and to see people that are excited to see you with genuine happiness versus excited to see you because they're having the worst day of their life and hoping you can fix it, is is kind of a treat.

[00:16:59.940] - Brian Shelton, host

Yeah, I totally get that. Speaking of that, how's the pandemic affected you folks in the fire service?

[00:17:06.450] - Joe McEnergy

It's I would say it's testing our ability to kind of the motto of the fire services, adapt and overcome. And it's it's kind of tested us to that pretty well. That's the biggest difficulty we face are the constant changes. It's one day. This is the procedure now, the next day, this is the procedure. And we get more intel and more science and more information. So now everything we were doing two weeks ago has changed. Now we're going to do all of this.

[00:17:33.630] - Joe McEnergy

So it's been pretty much a constant reeducation. So and then just the you know, the concerns, our job is dangerous, but over time, through training, you get to know how a building is going to react during a fire. You get to know your SOPs for the ambulance and you find a comfort zone with the pandemic, everything changing constantly. And there was no authority or no senior guy who's done this before to go to. So we had to lean on each other a lot and just say, hey, we're going to we're going to treat this like a hazmat and we're going to gear up and take our time and make sure PPE is right and keep ourselves healthy.

[00:18:20.280] - Joe McEnergy

And our department has done has done pretty well with not having any real outbreaks, just a couple of minor flare ups and we're able to keep it under control.

[00:18:31.020] - Brian Shelton, host

Has that added to the, I don't know, the overall stress level or exhaustion level for the folks in the fire service?

[00:18:37.030] - Joe McEnergy

Oh, yeah, absolutely. Especially in those early days until we kind of gained the confidence in our procedures. It was, you know, the biggest concern is for all of us is bringing bringing a sickness home to your family. You know, it was bad enough. You know, you encounter people with your stomach flus or

colds. And no matter how many times you wash your hands, you always would seem to bring it home to your family. But when you're talking about bringing covid home, it is certainly a huge concern, you know, for most of the department, you know, your parents are, you know, in the senior citizen category.

[00:19:12.030] - Joe McEnery

So now it's like, OK, you know, can't don't wanna bring this home to my mom or my in-laws and get anybody else sick, because you would never want to be the person that brought the virus to somebody who ends up succumbing to the virus, because that would just be tremendous. So it was just that idea of, you know, being so cautious and so alert to every opportunity to make sure that, you know, you weren't going to bring things home.

[00:19:42.540] - Joe McEnery

So like a couple of fellows on the department, they had a new baby at home. So we shifted. It's my kids are older and healthy and strong. So it's like, all right, I'm going to go ahead and take the lead on this one. And we limited how many guys were going in on calls. And it's I know you got a brand new baby at home. Let's let's shift your position, puts you in a different spot so that you don't have to maybe take the chance of exposing yourself.

[00:20:08.640] - Joe McEnery

But as we got the the PPE and everything squared away and our procedures right. We've we've done OK. Nobody's really brought it home to their families. So we've been the awareness that we started with really, really helped us to take care of our families. And we found a calm in the storm. Maybe, but everybody's still very alert because now it's, you know, you're like on a streak. We haven't caught it. So now we want to make sure that we continue to go that way.

[00:20:34.660] - Brian Shelton, host

A sign in the firehouse that says this many days without catching the pandemic. Right.

[00:20:39.540] - Joe McEnery

So I haven't done that yet, but I might have to might have to try that. But everybody is distinctly aware of and nobody wants to be that guy, you know, the one that brings it to the firehouse or the one that really gets it rolling. What was the the historical figure with the nurse, Typhoid Mary, who was the carrier of typhus and was infecting people, but she was never sick herself? Nobody wants to be that guy.

[00:21:04.740] - Brian Shelton, host

Right, exactly. You don't want to be passing it around the firehouse or to anyone else or I mean, I imagine you deal a lot with going into nursing homes and hospitals and assisted living facilities and stuff as well. So you certainly don't want to be the one bringing it into there.

[00:21:17.190] - Joe McEnergy

I mean, that's you know, and and they've done a lot of they've made so many changes. And they they the nurses and the folks at the senior housing have done just tremendous work. And they they seem to be forgotten because you don't see them in the big red fire truck rolling down the street. But they've done some tremendous work to keep up the the folk spirits who live in those in those facilities and trying to help keep them healthy. And, you know, it's been rough for them too.

[00:21:49.230] - Brian Shelton, host

So Pre- covid times, what's a normal day like for you or a normal day like for a firefighter in general? I mean, I understand that every day is a little bit different, but what's the life of a firefighter,

[00:22:02.490] - Joe McEnergy

Depending on what department, We start about 8:00 o'clock in the morning with a shift and a roll call where you hand off your responsibilities from the previous day. So you meet with whoever was on the vehicle in the seat that you were in and just trade information and find out about calls and different issues or vehicle issues or equipment issues. So that way there's always you know, you're always ready to go check out your rigs. You make sure everything's right, everything's clean, everything's set in like a ready position or ready to go status usually.

[00:22:33.840] - Joe McEnergy

Then you grab a cup of coffee and we plot out the day with all of the crews that are going to be staying and on duty. And usually there's a schedule that includes training.

[00:22:42.150] - Joe McEnergy

And for the firehouse especially, meals are always an important thing. So everybody chips in for their their portion of the meals for the day. The cook plans the meals and does some shopping, and everybody attends training in the morning or the afternoon. And then you flip and then whoever's training gets covered by whoever had the training in the morning. So we pretty much work a kind of on eight to five, nine to five kind of day where there are activities, whether it's inspections or preplanning or drills that we go to usually five o'clock around five to you know, you'll sit down and have dinner.

[00:23:20.010] - Joe McEnergy

And then after five is I don't want to say free time because that sounds doesn't sound quite right. But maybe independent time is a good choice. You have the opportunity to work out how many guys are always working on new certifications or classes. A number of people are going back and finishing degrees or advancing their degrees, getting master's degrees and such with the intent of getting promoted and moving up. And then around 10 o'clock you are allowed to go to sleep. Whether or not that actually gets to happen is a different story and then rolls around at eight o'clock the next morning.

[00:23:59.070] - Joe McEnergy

You finish your twenty four hour shift and it all starts over again.

[00:24:03.330] - Brian Shelton, host

So how many twenty four hour shifts in a week for you.

[00:24:06.000] - Joe McEnergy

We do a rotation so it's twenty four hours on forty eight off. The departments have three shifts that allow you to. So you work a twenty four hour shift, eight a.m. to eight a.m.. So let's say that was Monday. So then you're off all the rest of the day, Tuesday, all of Wednesday. And then you would come back to shift on Thursday morning at eight a.m. and start again.

[00:24:25.920] - Brian Shelton, host

Oh, well, how do you how. Wow, wow. That seems like a strange sleep schedule to get used to the most difficult.

[00:24:32.070] - Joe McEnergy

It is a little bit at first, but if you pay attention to it and you kind of listen to the old guys and how they've managed things, you get to a point where you not only enjoy it, but you count on it. There are so many things that as a firefighter, I was able to do that if I had been working or teaching in like a nine to five type job, I was classroom dad for my kids. I was the field trip dad.

[00:24:58.500] - Joe McEnergy

I was always my nieces and nephews needed something. I had that opportunity for those two days I was home. So it was kind of a neat position for me to be in, taking my kids and my nieces and nephews to preschool or different activities. It was just kind of a neat way to make it work. So it's when you get used to it and when you can get your family to adjust to it, it's it's really a neat schedule.

[00:25:26.370] - Joe McEnergy

I mean, but there are tough days. My wife puts up with a lot that day that I am on shift and has a lot of things that she has to handle on her own. But I like to think that I make up for it on my two off days with the things that I take care of on that day.

[00:25:40.710] - Brian Shelton, host

Shared responsibility, right? Division of labor.

[00:25:43.230] - Joe McEnergy

Absolutely. Behind every every police officer, firefighter, there's a husband or wife who's who's holding up, holding up the other end pretty, pretty tight. So it takes a lot of organization. So but we we seem to make it work.

[00:25:57.600] - Brian Shelton, host

So you're, what, 20 years into your firefighting career now?

[00:26:01.410] - Joe McEnergy

Yep.

[00:26:02.010] - Brian Shelton, host

What's what's the out what's the future? Where where do you go from here?

[00:26:06.720] - Joe McEnergy

Well, it all depends on what the future holds. So I'm what they call a tier one retirement. There is a tier two now that they've stretched the age and the requirements out a little bit. But at the time I was hired, you could retire at twenty years of service at fifty percent of your current salary at that time, but you also had to be over fifty years old. So and I'm not not quite to that point yet, but honestly, it'll be when the opportunity presents itself, you kind of hit your benchmarks of twenty years and age and time and you just kind of assess, you know, how the biggest point with the pension was that a lot of people.

[00:26:47.280] - Joe McEnergy

I guess resent who aren't in the pension system is the pension was for jobs that are going to beat you up both mentally and physically. You can't have a sixty five and a 70 year old firefighter pulling hose and picking up patients off the ground. And the work is not something you can do in your later years. So the idea of the pension was that we know we're going to beat you up, but we're going to make sure you're comfortable in your later years.

[00:27:14.170] - Joe McEnergy

So but for me, it'll be just an assessment of where my kids are at with with school and life and where my wife is at with her job. And as long as I'm still strong enough and able to do the job and the shoulders and the knees hold out, I'll probably do somewhere between 28 and 30 years.

[00:27:31.740] - Joe McEnergy

So another eight to 10, probably

[00:27:34.020] - Brian Shelton, host

thinking about going back into teaching at all?

[00:27:35.580] - Joe McEnergy

I'm kind of gone round and round with it. I may some a little bit, but the the classroom has changed so much just with with Zoom and digital, I would almost feel like I'd have to go back to and go back to school for a little while just to learn how to be in a classroom again. It certainly always a possibility. I did. I've always maintained my teaching certificate, even though I've been on the fire department.

[00:27:57.750] - Joe McEnergy

It was always kind of a safety net for me that if I was ever injured to the point that I couldn't go back to the job, I could certainly then go back and continue or start teaching again. But it's you know, you just kind of decide at that point what what you will do and what opportunities present themselves. There are opportunities to teach back in the traditional K-12 classrooms, but they're also a great number of opportunities to teach for IFSI, which is Illinois Fire Service Institute out of Uof I, the National Fire Academy and junior colleges like Harper are always looking for qualified instructors nationwide. We always seem to see quite a few requests for that.

[00:28:41.830] - Joe McEnergy

So my goal will be to see where where my kids land with their lives and see if we relocate and and decide from there. So that'll we'll see what happens when the time presents itself. There'll be a new a new path and it'll be a choice again.

[00:28:57.030] - Brian Shelton, host

Yeah, I always got to figure things out as they as they come along. So I just wanted to ask you one last question. What advice would you have for any high school student who is trying to figure out a path such as going to college, going to Harper, maybe going directly into a career? What advice do you have as a seasoned veteran now?

[00:29:15.780] - Joe McEnergy

I would say for those still in high school, use that last year, that last semester to try a bunch of different classes, maybe depending on your school, what opportunities they have, grab a computer class, grab a tech class, grab a business class, grab an accounting class, even if it's just a semester that for high school, it's free. Guys, let's let's figure it out. Well, it doesn't cost you anything. Take take the time and explore a little more.

[00:29:49.020] - Joe McEnergy

You know, you get your basics down. You got to have your math, your English and your science. But maybe just try a class out of your comfort zone, pick something that you thought, boy, I've always liked that or it always interests me. You know, so many things guide. What we want to do for the rest of our lives is in high school, I wanted to be a finance major and a stockbroker because I wanted to make a lot of money.

[00:30:15.570] - Joe McEnergy

And then I realized number one that's not always the case, the number 2 the lifestyle and how difficult that is and the stress on that one, that's not so much fun, you know. So you have to look at all of the opportunities and decide what it is you want to do. And then sometimes you also have to look at it from the point of view of this is a job I like and I'm good at. And it provides me the opportunities to do other things because of that job.

[00:30:46.350] - Joe McEnergy

So maybe it's not, you know, the perfect job, but it allows you the opportunity to travel and explore and do other things so you can't be on vacation for your whole life. You got to have some way to fund that vacation. But people still seem to do it. The but what it all boils down to is you need a job that makes you happy. And if you're not happy with what you're doing, don't be afraid to step out and and change it up a little bit.

[00:31:15.210] - Joe McEnergy

And that's pretty much what I did with teaching, although I was good at it. I was providing for my family and, you know, growing up and doing things. But as I was teaching, I just was was still pulled back to the fire service. It's almost like, you know, they say it's a calling. And it was the opportunity showed up at a time that made me question my path. And it certainly has made all the difference.

[00:31:39.720] - Brian Shelton, host

That's great advice. Definitely follow something that seems like seems like a passion for you. Seems like a seems like a calling. I think it's fantastic advice for people.

[00:31:47.630] - Joe McEnergy

And it might not make as much money as other jobs, but believe me, if you're miserable, no amount of money is going to make up the difference of coming home and feeling awful and not happy every day.

[00:32:00.210] - Brian Shelton, host

So that's right. My dad is seventy four years old and he's still working full time. And I ask him, you know, Dad, are you going to retire? And he goes, I like my job. I like what I do. I like the people I work with. I don't see any reason to retire. And I'm like, OK, pal.

[00:32:13.760] - Joe McEnergy

That's the gymnastics coach that my daughter worked with out here in Crystal Lake. And as he said, he sort of retired. As he said, he actually sold the business side of the gymnastics gym and just coaches at his age because he still he said to me, doing what I love to do is retirement. And it was the working with the kids and spending that time. What he always didn't like to do was the office work and paying the bills and making the payroll and following the insurance.

[00:32:44.540] - Joe McEnergy

So his retirement was to sell off the business and just continue coaching. So again, got back to where he was passionate and happy and that's what he got to do.

[00:32:53.930] - Brian Shelton, host

Well, Joe, I want to thank you so much for the great life advice that you've given here and to potential students and friends and alumni of Harper College. Just fantastic. And I want to thank you for your 20 years of service to the Elk Grove community and to the greater community here in our area serving in the fire department. We we can't thank you enough for the work that you do and to thank the other firefighters for the work that they do as well.

[00:33:16.760] - Joe McEnergy

And certainly it's it's been our pleasure.

[00:33:18.920] - Brian Shelton, host

Have a great day, Joe. Thanks for being on the show. OK, take care. Thanks again. Thanks. Bye bye.

[00:33:24.050] - Brian Shelton, host

Harper Talks is a co-production of Harper College Alumni Relations and WHCM Harper Radio. Our show is produced by Shannon Hynes. Our technical producer is Eric Bonilla Sanchez. Our theme music was created by Aidan Cashman. I'm Brian Shelton. Thanks for listening.