

Water Treatment is Essential Work

Two Adult Education Students Discuss the Program that Led to a Good (and Essential) Job

Garry Johnson Interviews Tom Connelly



Garry Johnson is a hardworking individual and wants to help others do well so those he helped can go on to help others. He is also a student at X-Cel in Boston, MA.



Tom Connelly works as a wastewater operator. He is a graduate of X-Cel Conservation Corps in Boston, MA. He is also a musician.

Has the pandemic affected your work?

If this were a year ago, I would be out of work. I used to work in restaurants, but most of them closed due to the coronavirus. I didn't like working those type of jobs because my real goal in life was to help the environment. A friend told me about the X-Cel Conservation Corps, and that's how I got a job working for a private company called Linden Ponds Water Treatment Facility in Hingham, Massachusetts.

How did X-Cel prepare you for this work?

X-Cel Conservation Corps is a career readiness program for young adults, ages 18-29, that focuses on the environment and prepares you for careers in the water industry. I worked as part of a crew on water conservation projects for 10 weeks. Then I was hired for a paid internship in a wastewater treatment plant for 14 weeks. During this time, I

studied for my Wastewater Operator's license and I passed the exam in December 2019. Right before the coronavirus hit, I was hired as a full-time wastewater operator with a level 4 license. That is an essential job, and I have been working full-time right through the pandemic.

Why did you choose this path?

Ever since I was a kid, I've wanted to do something to help the environment. Working in wastewater treatment, I am helping to keep the environment clean. We make sure that the water we use gets cleaned and treated before being returned to the environment.

What advice do you have for others who might be interested in this path?

If you want to become a wastewater operator, you will need to do research, study a lot, and take online practice tests. There are a lot of jobs available

in this field today. Many wastewater operators are going to retire soon, so if we can get young adults into the field, then that would be great for them. It does provide a good and stable income, and the benefits include health, dental, vision insurance, retirement plans, and paid vacations

Are you happy with your job?

Yes, it's better to have a job you love for a long time rather than going from job to job. I'm glad

I took the time to get training and pursue a career. Now I have time and energy after work to make music. If you are interested in a career, you should go chase it, no matter what obstacles you face! I am lucky to be in a much better place during this pandemic because I chased my career interest.

AFTER YOU READ: According to the author, what makes his job good?

What Makes a Job a Good Job?

1. Work in pairs and interview each other about your jobs. Ask questions like: What training did you need for this job? How did you get it? What do you like and not like about it? How has your job been affected by the pandemic? What advice do you have for someone else who is interested in this job?

2. Share your interviews with other classmates. From the interviews, create a list of qualities that make a job good. Group the qualities into four categories:

1. **The current context:** For example, is this job essential work? What is its projected growth? Can the work be outsourced (to people or computers)?
2. **The day-to-day nature of the work:** For example, does this job involve working with people? Working at a desk? Working outdoors?
3. **How the job aligns with your career goals:** For example, does this job give you room to grow? Will you be represented by a union? Does it pay well enough to support you and your family? Does it provide benefits?
4. **How the job aligns with your values:** For example, are you doing work that makes you feel fulfilled?

3. Organize these qualities onto a chart* with responses along a spectrum. Yes or no is not always the best response to a question. Rather, the answer may fall along a spectrum. E.g.:

Is this job essential work?

definitely mostly somewhat minimally not at all

4. Choose a career or job you are interested in and fill out the chart. Use this as a guide to help you think about what kind of work you want to pursue.

5. Look further! See "Good Jobs, Not Just Any Jobs," Issue #36 of *The Change Agent* and the *Integrating Career Awareness into the ABE and ESOL Classroom: Curriculum Guide* <https://www.collegetransition.org/student-supporters/publications/integrating-career-awareness/>.



***Note:** See our Issue "Extras" for Issue #51 for an adaptable version of this chart in Word.