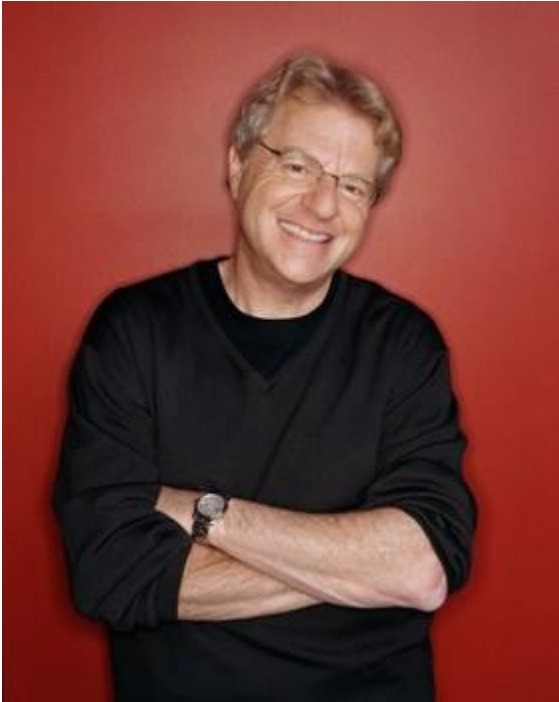


Jerry Springer talks about his first job and has advice for today's teens

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Jerry Springer

In an exclusive interview with Renée Ward, popular TV talk show host, [Jerry Springer](#) shares with me what he did, what he learned, and offers advice for today's teens seeking their first job. This is the first in a series of articles about the "first paying jobs" of successful people and their advice for today's teens.

Born in London in 1944, after his family fled the Holocaust, Springer immigrated at age 5 to New York City with his family. For Springer and his family, America represented a place where people could live without persecution. No doubt Springer's upbringing and first job as a teen set the tone for his future success.

Ward: What was your first paying job and how old were you?

Springer: You're asking about a long time ago like back in the 1950's. I delivered newspapers, the Long Island Press on my bicycle. I had to get up at a ridiculously early hour, go to the printing press and load up my bike basket and off I went. It was the first job where I actually got paid. I was so excited about it but it was never fun when the alarm went off at about 4 o'clock in the morning before I had to go to school. I must have been about 13 or 14 years old. Yep, that's what I did.

Ward: How did you learn about this job?

Springer: Through a friend. There were other kids in the neighborhood doing it so I asked my parents if I could do it too and there was some resistance. Maybe in today's world they may not have permitted it but it was sort of an ideal time when there wasn't the kind of danger that exists today with a kid being out all alone in the wee hours of the morning. In addition to going to houses, I had to go into buildings and my parents cautioned me to be careful. I can't imagine that a young person would be permitted to do this today.

Ward: What was the resistance?

Springer: Well, they didn't think that I was old enough. (Chuckle) They said, "Gerald, you're going to be working the rest of your life. But, having this job made me feel all grown up.

Ward: What qualities did you bring to the job? That is, why do you think you "earned" the job?

Springer: There was always a very, very, strong work ethic in my family. My parents were immigrants and they never missed a day of work in their lives. Likewise, I was never allowed to miss a day of school. As a kid when I may not have been feeling well and I asked if I *had* to go to school, the answer was a resounding Yes! You know, I had to go to school because there was no one to take care of me if I didn't.

Early on I learned two basic rules, never to be late and don't miss a day of work unless you're dying. I absolutely remember that.

Ward: Did you have a "mentor"? If so, how did that help you?

Springer: The honest answer is my parents and my sister Evelyn were my mentors. They were my role models to make sure that I never got into any trouble. My sister was real active in what we called, "The Americanization of Gerald".

My parents didn't know much about American customs so my sister who went through the grades before me kind of knew that baseball was big in America, thought I should get involved in the Boy Scouts, take guitar lessons and get into the Little League.

There were family meetings where I was "told" what I would do next. I never cared that much except the time when my sister, and this just dawned on me, we were living in this apartment building and there were about four boys my age and three of them also had older sisters. Well, the sisters got together and convinced our parents that on Saturday mornings us boys had to take dance lessons which just pissed us off.

We wanted to play ball in the school yard. There were about 25 older girls and just us three boys so we had to be their dance partners. It was just such agony for us. So after about five weeks of this torture, my dad stepped in and said Gerald doesn't have to do dance anymore. It was an innocent time and I was so naïve. My sister felt it was time to introduce me to one of the social graces. It was such a different planet compared to how things are today.

Ward: Did anything go wrong on the job? If so, how did you overcome the challenges?

Springer: Not really. I do remember having to go deliver the papers when the weather was bad and trying hard to stay balanced on my bike. No one wanted a wet soggy paper.

That's about it. I had an idyllic childhood, other than having to take the dance lessons. (Chuckle) The newspaper job prepared me for my next job which turned out just great and was the first time I was on television. I was 16.

We lived in Kew Gardens, a community in Queens, NY, and next door to Forest Hills, NY where I got a job as a ball boy at the Westside Tennis Club. Back then the U.S. National Championships were held there.

I was paid 55 cents an hour when I actually worked a match. I went in at 9 in the morning and sat around until I was called for a match. I'd be there until 7 or 9 at night. I'd be there 10-12 hours or so and would only work one or two matches a day and go home with only two dollars.

Years later, I got a check in the mail from the government. Apparently there was a lawsuit brought against the facility and they had to pay the ball boys minimum wage for when we were there and paid me for all the back pay that I should have gotten. I got like a \$47 check or something.

One of the matches I worked was the Men's Singles Final in 1960 between Rod Laver and Neale Frazier. The match is in a newsreel. Well, jump ahead a few years, I'm in law school in Chicago and I have a date and we go to see this movie called, "Blow Up" with Vanessa Redgrave.

Before the movie an old newsreel ran. And there in this newsreel is the Men's Singles Final of 1960 between Rod Laver and Neale Frazier. All of a sudden I'm looking at the screen noticing that it looks familiar and then I see me in the newsreel running across the court. This is a true story.

And then I yell out in the theater, "Oh my God, that's me!!!" (Laughter) [I am the little blond kid running across at the net.](#)

But, here's the worst part of it. For the next six nights, each night I would take a different girl to see "Blow Up" and I'd always pretend that I was seeing the newsreel for the first time and yell out, "Oh my God, that's me!!!" I was such a loser. That was the first time on television, in that newsreel.

Ward: What did you learn from the jobs you held as a teen that has prepared you for what you are doing now?

Springer: I have never missed a newscast and I've never missed a TV show. It was instilled in me by my parents. My Micki and I were the same way with our daughter Katie. Katie would say, "Aw come on dad." I'd say, no, these are the rules we live by. Once you sign on, you do your job. A solid work ethic is important.

It's my belief that you cannot plan out your career in life because you are not in charge of it. You know, things just happen. But, if you really work hard at what you do, someone will notice. You'll either get a new job offer, a promotion, or some new assignment. That's virtually every job I've ever had in life.

Jobs were offered to me. The only jobs that I went after were the political ones, city council member and then mayor of Cincinnati, OH. Other than that, all other jobs were offered to me.

I was recruited after serving as mayor by two of the television stations in the area and offered a position as news anchor at their station. I wanted to do political commentary.

One of the stations would allow me to anchor the news and do a two minute commentary about something that was happening in the news at the end of the show so that's what I opted to do. I found that I enjoyed it. This relationship lasted for more than 10 years. The newscast dominated in the ratings.

The company that owned the station, Multimedia, also produced TV talk shows. Phil Donahue, a talk show host, was getting close to retirement. The CEO of Multimedia pulled me aside and told me that they were starting another talk show and I was "told" to host it. I was an employee. I was assigned to the show. I didn't audition. I didn't try out. I was doing the news in Cincinnati as well as this new talk show in Chicago, IL. I did that for two years, flying back and forth.

I had no idea that the Jerry Springer show would take off or become what it has become. It's been a gift.

So I can't really advise someone about what to do in a job interview. I have no idea. I've been so lucky in life in that regard. When I look back on why I lucked out, knowing that no one is in charge of luck, one thing that you

can do to help, is just work hard at something and someone will notice. And, good things will happen because of it.

I've never had a career plan. The only thing I cared about when I was younger was sports and politics. Those are still my passion. But I never had a career goal.

Ward: Do you think that you will ever return to your roots, meaning political commentary?

Springer: Well, you never know. I'm 70 so there's not going to be another career. I could see my retirement job being political radio because there are so many conservatives and a liberal voice would be nice. But, I'm going to continue to do my TV show for as long as they want me to do it. It's fun to do and it's not hard work so why not.

Ward: So what advice would you give teenagers today who are seeking their first job experiences?

Springer:

- Show initiative.
- Whatever you are doing, really work hard at it.
- Do not miss a day of work.
- Do not be late.
- Do really good work, someone will notice and better things will come as a result.
- Don't limit yourself to what you think you want to be.
- At 16, 99% of us aren't going to be what we think we are going to be. It's not because you're not committed, it's because you're not in charge. You don't know what opportunities may open up, or who you might meet that changes your direction in life. There are so many variables and things you have no control over and all of a sudden things will be different.

Again, if you want to expand the opportunities you have in life, just be really good at what you are doing.

For more job advice for teens visit--[Teens4Hire.org's My First Job page](http://Teens4Hire.org).