

## You can do better, whoever you are

Written by Julie Desmond  
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In the book *The Question Behind the Question*, John G. Miller describes the importance of taking personal responsibility and shifting blame statements like *Who broke the copier?* to solution statements, *How can I fix this thing?* Today's job market has a lot of people playing the blame game: nobody's hiring, I don't have the right skills, and it's too late to learn.

It is never too late. Taylor Cisco at Contata Solutions, a tech company in Minneapolis, wants people to know they can be successful, no matter where they come from. Cisco suspects that lack of training is causing the deepening divide between the haves and have nots. A shift in thinking is the first step to bridging this dangerous gap.

Cisco is VP of Digital Content and Director of Interactive Marketing at Contata. He explains, "I'm a young guy, early thirties. I don't come from a fancy background. I was a musician in high school and wanted to be the next Jimi Hendrix. I never thought I'd end up in marketing." But he did, and he knows the same success he enjoys can come to others, if people only open up to the opportunities around them.

Cisco knows that a few critical choices propelled his career forward. He had a job slinging boxes at a shipping company, but suspected he could do more. He knew how to type a bit, so he checked in at a temporary staffing agency, completed an application, took a typing test and was offered a clerical position. He says, "I was making the same money I would make in fast food, but I was in a professional setting." He believes working in offices taught him how to interact professionally; being surrounded by successful people enhanced his own potential for success.

There were obstacles, of course. People don't always expect a six foot two Black guy to be

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sitting there answering phones, for example. Cisco says It was worth it, for the experience, knowledge and contacts he was exposed to.

Willingness to learn has been another secret to Cisco's success. Cisco discovered that people are willing to help, if he is willing to ask. Learning to use a computer should be a first step for anyone who feels down on their luck because so many positions require it. Even retail positions involve entering customer data and using computerized cash registers. Computer knowledge just is not an add-on anymore.

Learning is possible, no matter your age or financial situation or experience. Cisco's mother got along well in life never burdened with anything she didn't need. But there came a time, after retiring as a teacher, when she started a nonprofit organization and needed to communicate with people through email. She was nervous, so Cisco taught her one small thing at a time. Starting slowly boosted her confidence.

Resources to learn computers abound in Minneapolis and St. Paul, through the Urban League, Workforce Centers and libraries, as well as through community education. Choose something to learn, Google, email, or job searching for starters. Find a place to go, ask for instructions. It might not be easy at first, so keep at it. As the legendary Jimi Hendrix said it, "Sometimes you want to give up the guitar, you'll hate the guitar. But if you stick with it, you're gonna be rewarded."

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