

Concept

a powerful, intriguing, inspiring, or perhaps odd idea distilled to its essential elements

I was searching washingtonjobs.com, a common activity of discontented young entry-levels: "Do you have strong interpersonal skills, impeccable personal integrity..." I read on, nodding, "an interest in public affairs, foreign language proficiency, ability to take calculated risks?"

It was a job posting for the Clandestine Service in the Central Intelligence Agency.

I had some international experience, a degree in Spanish. I wanted to do something worthwhile, politically influential.

I applied, then forgot about it. A month later, I was called. The preliminary phone interview covered my background and basic current affairs. I threw out buzz words like "preemptive" and "nonproliferation."

Next, I attended an information session in a hotel with blacked-out windows and about 100 other hopefuls. Over the next eight months, I had a succession of in-person interviews, with the number of hopefuls in the lobby getting smaller with each visit. I met with operatives who grilled me and briefed me on the lifestyle: living abroad under cover, recruiting spies, secret meetings, counter surveillance.

The interviews got harder, testing my knowledge and my ability to manipulate through role playing. I kept receiving invitations to unmarked of-

fices in Northern Virginia business parks. The last round was three days of intelligence and personality tests: Would you prefer to write music or paint? Do you need much sleep? I met with a psychiatrist. There was a mirror on one wall (I think people were watching), and he'd leave sporadically and re-enter with a new question. Certain I'd made the cut, I started to prepare mentally for the transition from marketing associate to international spy.

Some time later, I received a short, but kind, rejection letter. I was disappointed, but I trusted the CIA knows who's right for the job. The interviewers probably saw that I couldn't sacrifice certain aspects of a normal life: family, hometown, openness, social life, security.

There are people we'll never meet who are willing to give up those conventions to serve their country without recognition or praise. They'll never be thanked; we'll never hear of their triumphs, only their failures.

I did find a job that I love. I couldn't ask for more, except for James Bond as a colleague.

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How to Apply to the CIA

You Never Know, You Might Want To.



By Haidee Henderson