

Alan, a College of Hair Design alum: How College of Hair Design Supports Real Student Success

Tell us a little about yourself and what inspired you to pursue barbering as a career?

I became connected to the barbering world through my beard care line - Big Dobs Beard Balm that I established in 2016. During that time, I worked at the social media company LinkedIn. I was never a good fit for the corporate world but stayed on due to family obligations and bills. A creatively minded metalhead doesn't belong in a cubicle tied to a laptop. When I would talk with barbers when delivering my products or getting my beard trimmed, they all seemed to genuinely enjoy what they did. A true fulfilling career and not just a job to "get by". A chance encounter with Carol Roush, orientation instructor at CHD, started some true motivation. We were both judges at a beard competition several years ago. We got to chatting a bit and she told me "I see the makings of a great barber in you Mr. Dobmeier. If life ever changes and presents the opportunity to walk this path I want you to give me a call". That opportunity would present itself in November of 2024.

Was barbering a second career for you? If so, what motivated the career change?

Barbering was a second career for me. In November of 2024, after 10 years at LinkedIn, I was laid off. Layoffs had been happening for a number of years through outsourcing overseas. I knew it was a matter of time before it was my turn but I thought I had a little more than I did. Given my background, I could have slid into another desk job doing similar work that I had been doing for 20 years. I had solid leads and recommendations that could be taken advantage of. I was reviewing a job lead sent to me by a friend the same day I was laid off. I could have the job if I wanted it. I've got a kid, wife, mortgage, and so forth. I've always been a provider and that part of me wanted to take the job but I hesitated. I didn't really want the job. I refused to go back to that corporate world. What Carol had said to me years prior was on repeat in my head. I scheduled my visit to CHD that night and started walking the path towards barbering.

What made you choose CHD for your barber education?

My interactions with Carol led me to CHD. Andrew Foreman, my best friend and co-owner of the Foreman & Dobmeier barbershop, also encouraged me to attend CHD.

How did your time at CHD help prepare you for working in the barbering industry?

Having never cut hair before in my life, CHD gave me a good foundation for the real world behind the chair. As a second career barber, this has been a constant learning experience. I look at being a barber like many other trades. There are levels to this. CHD got to me the apprentice stage.

What were some of your favorite parts of barber school?

My favorite part of CHD was getting one on one instruction during haircuts. Mannequin heads and the classroom can only go so far. It is only when you have the tools in your hands, cutting real hair, and trying to meet someone's real-world expectations that skill truly manifests.

Are there any instructors, classes, or experiences that had a big impact on your learning?

Carol and Georgia were pivotal in helping me get through orientation. I didn't know how to part hair, roll a perm rod - anything. At 41, there is a lot of risk and associated stress with a career change like this. I'm not the typical student that anyone at CHD had dealt with. They were patient and encouraging every step of the way. Carol brightened every morning even when I was out of her class. Georgia couldn't have been more patient when I was lost in a haircut, tailoring herself to my learning style. Jermonte and Justin - absolute encouraging forces. We didn't get a lot of clipper training and when I hit the floor I felt lost, especially when it came to current hairstyles. They both really leaned in with some one on one time helping me acquire the skills. Not once did they make me feel inadequate or stupid for asking questions - over and over until the information translated and stuck. I genuinely miss our daily interactions. Dan really helped me prep for the licensing exam. He has such a great "let's get this shit out of the way so you can go cut!" attitude. I credit him and his teaching style with completing the program and acquiring my license. I would go as far as to say he is the reason that nearly every single person in my session passed.

Tell us the story behind Big Dob's Beard Balm. How did the idea start?

Big Dobs Beard Balm started as a small hobby for me. When I left PayPal for LinkedIn in late 2015 I started growing a beard. I didn't like shaving and there didn't appear to be any rules about facial hair at the new job. Once my beard started coming in it started to itch and get a little unruly. I did what everyone does and went to Google to find a solution and discovered beard care products were a thing. I then went to Amazon and bought a few products. After a few purchases I felt like I was getting a little ripped off considering the amount of product I was getting for the price. Being a creative guy I decided to take some money from a bonus at work to buy some ingredients and take a swing at making my own thing.

After many failed attempts over a double boiler and apartment stove, I came up with something I really liked. I then met my girlfriend, now wife, who liked the beard balm I had created. We were on a date at a bar one evening and she had stepped away for a moment. When she came back, another woman was admiring my beard and complimenting the scent, shine, and so forth. I was informed that by my wife that I had clearly made something with real potential. That being said, she clarified that I'd either need to monetize what I'd made or shave off my beard. I filed my LLC papers the next day, picked up another job at a warehouse to cover the costs, and got to work.

How did it feel seeing your product sold at CHD and quickly become a top seller?

It felt great to get my products into CHD and getting the other barbers on-board with it. I did start my own incentive program at my cost to encourage the sales. Each sale was tracked by the front desk and counted as an entry for raffle that I held. I would recommend that CHD implement something similar to encourage the sales to continue. Retail is an important part of the revenue stream stream for barbers and learning to sell while at school is valuable.

What advice would you give to someone considering barber school?

Take it seriously and learn how to be a professional. Don't waste your downtime while you're at school. There were a lot of guys who would talk about what they were intending to do and then proceed to waste the day, repeatedly. Make your LLC, plot out your barbershop (if that's the goal), and start making real moves immediately. Most importantly, keep your wits about you. Not everyone around you will have your best

interests in mind. Encourage others but keep your focus on you. Don't get distracted by the dysfunctional lives of those around you.

What has life been like since graduating from CHD and where do you see yourself in the next few years?

I go to my barbershop everyday to work with my best friend. My name is on the building, the logo I drew up is on the walls. I risked, sacrificed, stressed, and went through a lot during that year. I made it through and can say I'm a barber. I consider that to be victory. Over the next few years I see myself continuing to grow in the craft and expand the beard care business.

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