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CAREERS

I left Big Law at 29 to become a rabbi, then changed careers again at 40. Here's what I learned about finding the perfect job.

As told to [Joshua Nelken-Zitser](#) [+ Follow](#)



Justin Pines is the CEO of the Jewish Broadcasting Service, an international Jewish TV network. [JBS](#)

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- Justin Pines, the CEO of the Jewish Broadcasting Service, became a corporate attorney after college.
- At 29, he left Big Law to become a rabbi, before pivoting again at 40 into the media.
- This is what his career pivots taught him about finding a job that's the perfect fit.

This as-told-to essay is based on a conversation with Justin Pines, 42, the CEO of the Jewish Broadcasting Service, who lives in New Jersey. His education and former and current employment have been verified by Business Insider. This piece has been edited for length and clarity.

I always wanted my job to involve sharing Jewish ideas with a large audience, but I also felt I needed a safety net. So, I took the "safe" career path of becoming a corporate attorney.

After about three years as an attorney, I left law to train as a rabbi. It led to me becoming the director of character development at a Jewish middle school, which I did for three years between 2016 and 2019.

I loved it, but I pivoted again at 40 when I realized how hard it was to support my family that way. Now, I'm the CEO of the Jewish Broadcasting Service, a role that enables me to do what I'd always hoped.

With all of these changes, I learned about how to find a job that's the perfect fit.

I wanted to make movies, but I went into corporate law

When I was 13, around the time of my Bar Mitzvah, I became very taken with Judaism. I started observing Shabbat and became interested in learning more about the religion. The more involved I became, the happier I felt.

To try to bring Judaism to the world, ideally through making movies, I studied communications for my undergraduate degree.

Toward the end of my degree, which I started in 2001, making it in Hollywood felt overwhelming and unrealistic. So, I went to Harvard Law School, deferring for a year to study at a Jewish educational institution in Israel. People assured me law school would set me up for any job I wanted.

I began the program in 2006 and remember thinking a 30-year-old legal case in one of my first criminal law classes felt a little empty in comparison to the 2,000-year-old texts I had been reading, which felt divine and inspired.

Overall, though, studying for my JD law degree was great. It made my brain feel super sharp, I made some amazing friends, and it set me up well for my legal career.

I struggled with the long-term prospects of working in law

During the summer of 2008, the year before I graduated from Harvard, I interned at Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison. The company was full of excellent, smart, and kind people, so I accepted a full-time position that would start after I graduated.

From 2009, I spent two years on rotation across different corporate departments at the firm. I had the opportunity to work on interesting projects and do some impactful pro bono work.

In the short term, it was great: I worked hard and played hard, could afford my own apartment in New York City, and liked my colleagues. But, I struggled with my long-term prospects.

As is the case at many corporate law firms, everything felt like an emergency, and partners would often receive work at the worst possible times, like on Friday afternoons or right before Thanksgiving weekend. It became clear that's what would be waiting for me if I ever made partner.

I also had questions over whether it was meaningful work or the type of job where, no matter how senior you are, you'd be at the whim of others. I thought it might be time for something new.

I interviewed people in different industries to learn the pros and cons

In my third year at the law firm, when I was 29, I considered my career options. I made a chart with a list of six potential industries, including venture capital, real estate, Jewish non-profits, and becoming a rabbi. I

interviewed people in each career about what their job was like and listed the pros and cons.

I decided that more than anything else, I wanted to learn about Judaism. I was already studying the Talmud — the central text of Rabbinic Judaism — multiple times a week on the way to work. But I felt that I couldn't leave my high-paying job in law to study for the pursuit of knowledge and nothing more. I concluded that I needed another piece of paper, in addition to my BA and JD, which led me to a three-year vocational course at rabbinical school.

At the time, I thought I could make do with the significant pay cut I'd take if I became a rabbi.



Justin Pines on the set of JBS. Courtesy of Justin Pines

Shortly after I became a rabbi at 33 in 2016, I became the head of character development at a Jewish middle school in New York's Upper East Side.

In a perfect world, I'd teach kids about Judaism all day, every day, forever. It breaks my heart to say, but it's hard to support a family doing that, and I have a wife and children.

I wish educators were paid better, so more people felt inspired to get into the field. I have the utmost respect for those making it work, because it was a struggle. Personally, I needed a shift.

After three years in Jewish education, I went to work at a Jewish think tank. Through that job, I was a guest on the Jewish Broadcasting Service, a broadcast network available through US TV providers and streaming services. In late 2023, they told me they were looking for a new CEO.

I had studied communications at college, I wanted to share Judaism far and wide, and I had corporate experience: it felt like the role was the perfect fusion of my skills and interests. I joined as CEO at the start of 2024, at age 40.





Justin Pines interviews stand-up comedian Modi Rosenfeld on the set of JBS.
Courtesy of Justin Pines

At JBS, we broadcast shows that feature rabbis, artists, writers, and academics of all political and religious persuasions.

I have a show where I typically interview leading Jewish thinkers. I can hardly believe it's my job to sit with my heroes for an hour, asking them whatever I want. I'm constantly pinching myself.

The key is to find balance

People often treat their careers as ladders to climb rather than journeys with a North Star and lots to learn along the way. There was certainly a version of my life where I chose to stay in a lucrative career, in which I could have drawn meaning from things outside of work, like family or my volleyball team.

For much of my career, the challenge was achieving a balance between finding meaning, but not only from my job, and financial stability while doing something I love, among other things.

I think I have found balance now. I feel blessed to love what I'm doing.