

# Should You Always Strive to Work at the Most ‘Prestigious’ Places? Well ...

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If you want to build a successful career, you have a dilemma on where to start. Should you pick the most prestigious organization, where you’ll be a small fish in a big pond? Or should you take the most influential position, where you’ll be a big fish in a small pond?

Kat Cole has an answer, and it’s not what you’d expect. At just 32, Ms. Cole became the president of a billion-dollar brand: Cinnabon. Her meteoric rise didn’t begin from a blue-chip company or a high-impact role. Her pivotal decision was to start her career as a waitress ... at Hooters.

Although people are often [drawn to the workplaces](#) with the highest status, it’s not always best to be in the biggest pond. [In a 2017 study](#) of professional soccer teams, researchers examined what happened to players on teams that were just above and below the cutoff to get relegated to a lower division.

Being dropped to a lower division sent teams down to a smaller pond with weaker competition. Yet over their careers, younger players whose teams were downgraded landed in stronger leagues and earned higher wages. Why? They got more playing time because the stakes were lower and they faced less competition for key positions — and they grew more as a result.