

Classroom to Career

FOR MANY TEENS, breaking free of the ghetto and into life is the struggle of a lifetime. For others, the teen years are no struggle at all . . . just an aimless drifting from one thing to the next. Still others drift not because of complacency, but because they have given up hope and don't believe in any future at all.

The tragedy for these and other teens is that they will make nearly all of their life-long career decisions alone, with no one to give them hope, no one to help them over the hurdles, and no one to help them find a dream worthy of their souls. The following thoughts may help you and your church prepare your young ones for jobs and lives with a future and a purpose.



Begin Early According to a 40-year study by Harvard University, the starting place is age 4. Young children who learn to enjoy work at a young age simply never go to prison—not for their entire lives—no matter what hardships and disappointments they may experience. And it's even more effective when the work is done together. Assigning chores may seem like the only way for parents, especially single moms, to keep the house running, but assigned chores produce zero joy.

Try setting aside as little as five or 10 minutes each day for the whole family to pitch in. A little music can make these few minutes a joyful experience. By the time a child is 6, he/she can be a part of preparing meals. Good parents tell their children what to do. Great parents help them find something to do. Five minutes once a day when they are 4, 5 and 6 gives children a sense of being a valued contributor and will keep them out of prison for the rest of their lives.

Be Relevant. From age 6-14 a child spends thousands of hours in the public school system. Sadly, most classrooms have little to do with the real world—the working world. An exception to the rule is the Alliance of Community Educators (ACE) in Kansas City, Kansas. This very small, mostly volunteer group recruits working people—doctors, construction workers, mechanics, and others—to go into the classroom and tell children why they chose their job and why they like/love it . . . or why they don't.

Hearing about real jobs from real workers gets children thinking, which is the one thing education should be all about. Ask your children's teachers if they would be willing to devote two to three hours a year to having working guests in their classrooms. Motivating a child to think about jobs can also be done in the home or library. An occasional visit to a friend's place of work can make all the difference. Even the church might consider dedicating one day a year to a field trip, visiting various workplaces. Giving children a sense of what the real world is all about can be a precious gift they can't get anywhere else.

Emphasize the Spiritual At age 11-12, after a child has an idea of what work itself is all about, the spiritual part of a career must be made clear to young hearts. Rick Warren's book *The Purpose Driven Life* makes an excellent gift. Age 11-12 might be considered a bit young to be thinking about one's life mission. Sadly, however, television and peer culture give us no time to wait.

The best protest a parent can make against the "muckathon" of network television and the hollowness of the Hollywood lifestyle is to give our children alternatives. If we fail to do this, their career choices will be limited, sensationalism will become their religion, and outward appearance will be viewed as the "rock of their salvation." The loving child with a knowledge of, and a heart for, the helping professions is rapidly becoming a thing of the past. A national shortage of teachers and health-care professionals is proof of this. Children should be gently led to consider God and others when choosing a career.

Prepare for the Immediate Future By a child's junior year he/she should be thinking about the next step in his/her education or a first step into a career. This could mean targeting a high-paying production job with a local manufacturer, vocational training in a technical field, or seeking a college scholarship. Whichever course a student chooses, especially a student from a single-parent family, he/she will need coaching. The first best choice is almost always a retired saint from the community with a heart for students and a talent for recruiting volunteers. One national Christian organization that can help train those volunteers is Jobs Partnership. Their Website is www.jobspartnership.org.

In the end, however, even the best curriculum or staff development videos depend on the loving involvement of believing adults—men and women willing to commit one or two nights a month to talking with and praying with a young person in need. And this should ideally involve the parents as well.

I recently read a book titled *Freakonomics*, which gives the average wage of a street-level crack cocaine dealer as \$3.33 an hour. Surely the church can offer the inner-city young person a better career with the help of training from a few adults on one or two evenings a month. No organization—government or private—can help a young person a fraction as much as a prayer group that makes him or her feel welcome.

Apply for Help After 16 years of building a child's character, faith, work ethic and confidence, it's now time to help him or her find a scholarship. The following techniques and resources can help, especially when they are accompanied by prayer.

Ask several local schools for a list of scholarships received by last year's graduating class. Often this list can be found on the Internet. Apply for as many as the student meets the requirements for.

Talk to every relative you have, and ask what clubs they belong to. Have your student write two paragraphs telling why he or she wants to go to college and why help is needed to do so. It can't hurt to send this information to all the clubs and service organizations in town, even if no relative is involved. You may also do a Google search for large corporations, and add the word scholarship. High school guidance counselors and counselors at colleges the student wishes to attend will be helpful resources. Make yourself a regular caller or visitor.

Colleges are usually eager to help if it means you might choose them. They are especially impressed by students who begin their search as a junior. It also gives them more time to look for a scholarship on the student's behalf.

Talk to professionals in the student's chosen field, and ask if they know of any professional scholarships. Most public libraries subscribe to the Foundation Center Directory online. It is a great way to find the largest and best scholarships. Some of the best searches are these: Scholarships and Your State, Scholarships and Your Field, Scholarships and Your Gender, Scholarships and Your Race. Many libraries have an entire section of books on how to find a scholarship. Those who don't should. Ask if they can suggest a good book from another library. Utilize the Word

As always, the best source of advice is from God's Holy Word. Following are some verses you might share with a young person who is thinking about what his future will bring: Deuteronomy 8:18: "Always remember that it is the Lord your God who gives you power to become rich, and he does it to fulfill the covenant he made with your ancestors."*

Mark 4:19: "But all too quickly the message is crowded out by the cares of this life, the lure of wealth, and the desire for nice things."

Proverbs 12:24: "Work hard and become a leader; be lazy and become a slave."

Proverbs 22:29: "Do you see any truly competent workers? They will serve kings rather than ordinary people." (This means you will get a good job.)

Colossians 3:23: "Work hard and cheerfully at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people."

*Scriptures are from the New Living Translation.

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