

KIDS DESERVE A GREAT CAREER

by Sally Burgess, Forefront Families LLC

It never ceases to amaze me just how many high school seniors say they have absolutely no idea what career they want to pursue when they leave school. To have no such clue at high school graduation is a foreign concept to me and would give me a very insecure feeling indeed.

I knew exactly what I wanted to become when I was about 6 years old and I never wavered from it. I wanted to become a registered nurse because I greatly admired my aunts and cousins who were nurses before me. I thought that helping to heal the sick was a noble vocation and my confidence in being able to pass all the necessary examinations was bolstered by a family who had succeeded before me. Even though my grades through high school did not reflect a particularly bright future, I was determined because I had great role models and I was driven because I wanted to experience their feeling of job satisfaction and success.

So why is it that kids today don't think about their futures while in high school? Obviously times have changed, but it is our responsibility not the school. In the 60s there were not so many vocational choices. Either we left school and got a job immediately, or we went to university and got a job related to our qualifications directly after that. There was no such privilege as a 'gap year'. It was school and then work. In New Zealand, where I come from, it was NOT an assumption in those days that the majority of high school graduates would go on to university. In fact, most kids left school and went straight to work. Fortunately, when I left high school there were plenty of jobs being offered and we seemed to get every job we applied for. There were no student loans, so if we didn't go straight to college we worked and, if necessary, saved up for our tuition. My husband and I both chose long-term professions that paid us for studying. Oh, for those days to return!

I have a theory that in this country, because so many students go on to college straight after high school, and because the first year or two are non-specific, they think there is plenty of time to make up their minds as they go along. There are hazards attached to that! Sometimes such a vital decision can be based on a mood of the moment, the influence of friends or desperation. Another problem is that by not being sure at the outset, students may redirect their studies, sometimes several times, thus ending up taking courses they don't eventually use. Worse, they acquire degrees that are so generic or commonplace that they have no particular influence in getting a job. I also think that when students don't pay for their own tuition, they do not experience the consequences of their own indecisiveness. Whether or not students go on to college there are great vocations for all young people.

I do not think that parents should force their children into careers that they themselves have followed, or WISH they had followed. (That is called 'living out your dreams vicariously through your children'). Neither do I believe that students should be pushed into careers that are beyond their mental or physical ability. That creates certain disaster. I do believe, however, that children should be encouraged to excel in order to reach their greatest potential.

We can help our children discover their skills, abilities and passions by carefully observing them from the time they begin school. It is very easy to see where they shine and what motivates and interests them. They also need to understand that they can't just concentrate on the subjects they enjoy. They need to be proficient in core subjects so that, by ensuring they do their best in subjects they don't like, they learn a very important lesson in life. It is called perseverance and this creates a fantastic opportunity to push through the hard stuff.

Parents play a great part in helping children to work out their life's pathways. I modeled my life on the relatives I most admired. They were my heroes. You need to be your children's heroes, too. Wouldn't it be a wonderful testimony for your children to go beyond anything you ever dreamed of in your life? There are just so many more options these days that make this entirely possible.

If your kids haven't a clue what they want to do with their lives as they leave school, you should be concerned. Help them find their way so they can create a great future without wasting valuable time deciding later. If you can't do it yourself, arrange for your young person to see a career counselor.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.