



Not My Kid

Published on November 29, 2018

“Apprenticeships, the trades, alternate pathways...so many opportunities, that’s great...but **not my kid.”**

I am guilty. I admit that before I truly understood all of the options available to students, I was part of the problem. See, I don’t even have children yet (although...my first is arriving in March!), and when I dreamt of my imaginary children’s future, I pegged them for big-name, 4-year or even advanced degree wielding kids. So before my children even had a chance to define themselves and their interests, I was setting a standard, and maybe an unfair one. Albeit I have not lived through this with children of my own yet, I have seen the internal struggle some students face to please their parents when making these big life decisions, and often the parents do not even know they are doing this.

I remember growing up, I never had to be grounded or punished in the traditional sense. All it took was knowing that parents and authority figures in my life were disappointed in me and I was crushed. **Add in the new age of obsessive sharing and social media addiction, and this pressure to impress is amplified.**

I have a unique position. When explaining my job to friends, family, those in my network, *everyone* shares their excitement for the work that we are doing. "That's amazing" and "Wow that is such a great opportunity for your students" are the common reactions.

I see students come through my door who know exactly what they want to do, they have post-secondary plans and specific career goals. These students often have fantastic support systems and have been exposed to many opportunities throughout their lives. I also see many students that know they either cannot afford, or have no desire to go into debt for a degree they aren't even sure they will ever use. Admittedly, these have become some of my favorite students to work with. These are the students whose lives will be changed by our Work Based Learning Program. These are the students that just need someone in their corner telling them that attending a local college or university while working to gain experience (and often incurring little to no debt), rather than following in their friends' footsteps is not just "ok," but an amazing plan.

A specific student of mine comes to mind when I think of alternate plans – this young lady is amazing. Her resume was beyond impressive, her GPA was top notch, and everyone put the pressure on her to figure out what university she would be attending. But you see, this student had no desire to buy into the "big box" university – she just wanted to start a life with no debt. Her plan was well thought out and showed immense maturity, so I hopped on board and helped her in any way that I could. I connected her with a fantastic company in town for a position related to her career goal and she is attending a 2-year program free of charge with plans to potentially transfer for her bachelor's degree following. I'd be willing to bet she will find an employer to pay for it. I recently received the most touching email from her updating me on the happenings in her exciting young career. She ended with this:

"You really were the lifesaver I needed my senior year and for the future."

My job is to help students discover their passions, build their network, and gain experience to use once they graduate high school. My job is not to judge their pathway. Four year degree? Awesome! Associates or certificate program? You go kiddo! Straight to your dream career? Woo hoo! As long as these students have a pathway to achieve their goals, I will always be in their corner. **Especially when we live in a country with \$1.5 trillion in student loan debt and with young adults never even using the degree they are in debt for (Forbes, 2018).**

My hope is that parents continue to be more accepting of the different options available to students. **Know what pathways exist.** Do your research before harping on the brand name on the diploma. I can guarantee you that, in the end, experience will always prevail over the name on your degree. Help your students discover what drives them, then put a plan into place with internships, mock interviews, job shadows, etc. to support them in achieving their goal. There is likely more than one path to the final destination.

Yes, your kid.