



## Path Discoveries for our Children's Future Success

By Jen Denys, Career Management Professional

Confucius said "Find a job you love and you'll never work a day in your life". A simple truth, however, many adults in today's world still struggle to find what makes them feel a deep satisfaction and more complete as a person. Did you know that your children and their peers are beginning their career search before their 13<sup>th</sup> birthday? With the changes in public education and our society's expectation to be constantly moving towards a career destination, students are facing questions about their adult life as early as Grades 7 and 8. The most significant reasons for this evolution is so that students can select high school courses that serve as pre-requisites for college, university and other post-secondary learning.

As a Career Management Professional, I work with clients of all ages and in all stages of their careers. Some of my most rewarding work, however, is to offer support to tweens and teenagers and their parents, in an effort to help them embrace this career challenge. From our adult perspective, we may remember elementary and high school as a joyful, care-free time in our lives, but for our children who are living the experience, it isn't always so. Trying to figure out what they want to be when they "grow up" is coupled with managing academic pressures, social relationships, family dynamics and more. As parents, we want to guide our children and help them discern their gifts, but with the world changing at a rate of speed never seen before, we may not know where to start.

Based on my work in youth career counselling, I would like to offer the following thoughts and suggestions to both students and parents:

1. **Explore and investigate...** Remove the idea from your head the idea that you have to find the "right" career for you at this moment. Find out what you can about the world of work. What are the trends right now? What kinds of jobs exist? Start in the circle of what you know and move outwards. What do your parents do? Who works with your parents and what do they do? What subjects are you taking in school? What careers are related to those subjects? Remember, that if you are studying the subject of "Law" there are more jobs in that field than being a lawyer. Use the internet to find out more information and ask people. Ask your teachers about their jobs or the subjects you're taking. Ask your parents and their friends what it is like to do the work that they do. Find people that love their jobs and 9 times out of 10 they would be happy to share information with you.
2. **Identify your gifts...** Everyone is good at something. It's okay if you haven't found out what that is yet; I promise you it's there. By the age of 13, people can begin to identify what their strengths are. If that seems too hard of a question, what do you like to do? Do you like school? Maybe a particular subject? What do you enjoy doing at home? When do you feel the happiest? What has someone given you a compliment about? You may think that everyone is good at that one thing, but the that's not likely true. Start a list of what you enjoy doing and are good at and conversely what things you dislike and struggle with.
3. **Life values...** Do you ever picture what your adult life will be like? Do you see in your imagination anything in particular about where you'll be living or what you may be doing? It's okay if you're not sure. As your teenage years pass, you're going to get many opportunities

to try new things and understand what is important to you. Open yourself to these chances and use them as steps to learn about yourself. Do you like to travel? Do you like being close to your family? What kind of life lessons have your parents taught you as you grew up? Do you agree with these completely or perhaps, in part? Think about the qualities you would look for in a person when making a new friend – what is most important to you?

4. **Parents as coaches...** From the moment we become parents, we have a host of expectations for our children. We want them to be kind, respectful, caring, thoughtful... and a long list of other characteristics. Although limits and rules are still important for their basic safety, when it comes to helping our children navigate the paths of career exploration, it is time for us to become our child's coach and supporter. In his book *"Cure for the Common Life: Living in Your Sweet Spot"*, Max Lucado explains that our children are born to us as a written book that has yet to be read. They have talents and gifts naturally and divinely given to them and it is our job to read the book, and to understand and encourage the development of these characteristics. So, parents as hard as it may be, silently leave your expectations behind and help your child explore his or her world. Praise your children for what they are good at and encourage them to find a way to positively share their gifts with others. The best way to help your child is to keep talking about what he or she is thinking and feeling – without judgment and without expectation.
5. **Don't try to plan your entire career...** If you were to ask 10 adults if their life and career is exactly what they expected it to be in their teens and twenties, I think you will be hard-pressed to find more than a couple (if any) who have stayed on the same track. Life brings us surprises and opportunities that are impossible to predict – that's what makes it fun!! Today's world of work is changing at an unprecedented rate of speed and it is impossible for you to plan your career more than a few years in advance. I encourage my clients to think long-term, but keep it flexible. Build upon your natural gifts and develop strengths that are important in a variety of jobs and careers. When you're young, this can be done in a part-time job, serving as a volunteer or even playing on a sports team.

I've read some articles recently that career exploration is too much for tweens and teenagers to take on at this time in their lives. They may well have a point. Perhaps it is an unnecessary pressure to expect our children to wrestle with questions that we, as adults, face ourselves. Right or wrong, it does seem to be unavoidable as the number of years in high school decrease and the average costs of post-secondary learning experiences increase. My primary focus as a Career Management Professional, is to help take some of the fear and stress out of this reality, to communicate the various opportunities that exist and to share information that will excite people about what lies ahead. With the right perspective and support, your children can generate positive self-awareness that will give them the confidence to make important decisions that will lead to personal satisfaction and success.

Jen Denys helps young people find their right path as Principal of The Right Path Consulting Group. Jen offers personal consultation, group workshops and speaks to classes and schools.

The Right Path Consulting Group  
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