

Article Title:

“After High School, Then What?”

I’ve been working with high school students since 1979 (as a Peer Counselor) then in Private Practice as a Professional Career Counselor since 1990, and parents will continue to ask the question, “Can my child really know what career they’re best suited for at such a young age?”

My experience concludes, yes, a person can know what career they’re best suited for at 16- yet many obstacles get in the way of the individual pursuing their best work.

Career obstacles of a teenager:

- 1) My parents don’t think it’s a secure enough field.
- 2) My teachers tell me, ‘It’s too competitive.’
- 3) My friends tell me, I’ll ‘never make any money doing it.’
- 4) I’m not sure what I’m good at.
- 5) I’m really confused, or not sure what I should major in.

So, what do I do as a teenager without direction and very real obstacles in place? I major in Business or I major in ‘whatever my friends are majoring in.’

I can’t tell you how many young people I’ve met who’ve majored in Business because they didn’t know what else to major in, only to find when they graduate...they still don’t know what to do or what jobs they are qualified for. This is unfortunate when an individual has an opportunity to understand their best work ‘prior to investing in college’ yet does not go through the process of self assessment and decision making, before they start. To be quite candid, the majority of my clients do not invest in Career Counseling until mid-life, when career changes are still successfully made, but at a much greater cost. Career changes at mid-life are often much more challenging (juggling kids, mortgage payments, along with going back to school to train for a new field.) Inevitably, I hear from my mid-life clients, ‘Had I only known you in high school, I could have been preparing to do this work all along.’

The question returns, Can I really know what career I’m best suited for at 16? If I worked with my mid-life clients in high school, could I have helped them? Understanding our individual life’s work comes from self- knowledge and self understanding. Knowing what skills energize us when we use them; knowing why specific experiences give us great satisfaction; understanding what we’re interested in. These are the elements of best work (values, skills, interests and personality.) Yes, at 16 we can gain insight and self understanding for focus on best fit career direction. Will we be centered on just one direction, after this insight? In some cases yes. Individuals with very specific and inherent aptitudes in Engineering, Art or Music, for example, will find it necessary to utilize their gift in their work, otherwise they feel ‘dead inside.’ It is as important to a born artist to do his or her art work as it is to breath. Art, Music, Engineering are fields where an individual is born with these aptitudes, and career decision making is more specific and clear cut. I must tell you, this is not the norm. Most of us fall into a more

complex career area possessing multiple aptitudes and transferable skills that can allow us to enter many career fields. For the population majority, at 16 we go through career assessment testing and there may be several career areas we're best suited for. This is good. Our final decision, however, on what to major in will depend on reality testing the career fields (talking with people working in careers we're interested in; interning; job shadowing; and getting involved with Trade and Professional Associations specific to our career interests.) Only after career reality testing do we really understand our best fit options, at any age.

My suggestion to any high school student (or college student undecided in their major) is to indulge yourself in career self assessment activities, as soon as you can. The teenagers and young adults who invest in self understanding now, may pave a bright future ahead for themselves, with limited obstacles.

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