

07/01/2007

## Parent Involvement in Student Career Planning

By Bob Fisher

Many parents are "clueless" about how to help their students explore and evaluate the hundreds of career possibilities available. This article is designed 1) to help school counselors motivate parent involvement by highlighting changes in the global workplace that have significantly raised the stakes for our youth and 2) to provide some of the tools to empower parents to motivate and support their children in the career exploration/planning process.

1. **Fact:** Career choice is one of life's most important decisions.
2. **Fact:** Choosing a career that matches your interest, skills and values significantly increases your chances for success and happiness.
3. **Fact:** Free resources are readily available to help students make informed choices.
4. **Fact:** Most students/parents **DO NOT** use these resources.

### Communicating the Need

Many parents unknowingly assume that the schools will take care of career planning. Unfortunately, according to the U.S. Department of Education NCES (National Center for Education Statistics) Report, the ratio of guidance counselors to students in public high schools is 1 to 284 in the U.S. Another NCES Report indicated that career planning is the high school guidance counselors' fourth priority behind 1) helping students schedule classes, 2) preparation for college and standardized tests (SAT, ACT) and 3) dealing with student behavior issues and personal development. Finally, students are not required to utilize most guidance counselor services (including career planning), so many avoid this area. Without parent involvement, some students will postpone career exploration indefinitely. Many students will enter college without direction, declare a major (if required) and simply go through the motions. Significant time and financial resources will be wasted. Parents will become frustrated. Students will feel increased anxiety as the need to find a job approaches. Some students will drop out, many will switch majors several times in frustration and others will graduate with degrees that the student has no desire to market. Who has the most influence in the first quartile of life? Where can the student learn the value of career planning? According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 57% of the 18-24 yr. olds in the U.S. live at home with their parents. If parents take action, this waste of human talent and resources is avoidable. The sooner the better. Growing competition in the workplace makes pro-active career planning even more critical.

### Explain the Urgency: The World Has Changed

Workplace competition has increased dramatically, global barriers have fallen and the social safety net is disappearing. Virtually free, real-time, global communication has made it cost-effective to use employees in India to support U.S. customers' product support inquiries. Outsourcing of everything from production to product design to accounting services has made job transfer between the U.S., Eastern Europe and Asia (China, India, Vietnam) common. The Internet provides consumers with the information (and power) to demand the best products at the lowest prices, where and when they want them. This consumer power has increased competition throughout the entire supply chain: Retailer => Manufacturer => Suppliers => Employees. Only the best (companies and employees) survive!

At the same time that workplace competition is becoming more intense, the social safety net is disappearing. More and more, employees are "on their own" for income and healthcare in their retirement. Social Security is questionable and our children are likely to live longer than past generations, thereby increasing their "retirement nest egg requirement". Helping students choose a career that match their interest, skills and values significantly increases their chances for financial success, personal fulfillment and happiness.

### Empower Parents With Effective Tools

Parents need tools to motivate and to assist their child. School counselors can provide parents with real-life analogies or examples to which students can relate. For example, ask a student to think about all the time he or she has spent in school (K-12). For a student, this seems like "forever". Next, ask he or she to multiply that amount of time by six and explain that this is the amount of time they will spend in their occupation. Remind the student that in school they take math, history, English, science, social studies, etc. An occupation is like one subject. Think about getting up every day for the next 40 years and going to work for 8, 10 or 12 hours per day taking "one subject". It better be a subject that he or she enjoys.

Many tools are available on-line to support education and career planning. The cost and quality varies significantly. Some are difficult to find and/or use. More parents will engage in the process if the tools are readily available, quick to access and of high quality at little or no cost. For this reason, <http://www.collegecareerlifeplanning.org/> was created. This non-commercial site provides access to hundreds of the best, free tools on the web including such well known sources as the Occupational Outlook Handbook, Career One Stop, CollegeBoard, Princeton Review, O\*Net, etc. It also includes original content and provides creative ideas for motivating parents and students. This web site focuses heavily on motivation because, if parents and students are not motivated, the content is irrelevant.

Remember the first three facts... and change the fourth one!

1. **Fact:** Career choice is one of life's most important decisions.
2. **Fact:** Choosing a career that matches your interest, skills and values significantly increases your chances for success and happiness.
3. **Fact:** Free resources are readily available to help students make informed choices.

4. **Fact:** Most students/parents **DO NOT** use these resources.

**Bob Fisher** has an MBA from Harvard and currently teaches in the College of Business at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg. During his 25-year business career, he managed a business with \$500 million in revenue and over 1000 employees in Europe, Asia and the Americas. He interviews students for admission to Harvard University. Bob assists middle schools, high schools, colleges and parent organizations with career planning programs. All assistance/support is provided pro bono. He can be reached at (727) 278-8946 or [rsfisherjr@aol.com](mailto:rsfisherjr@aol.com).