

Preparing youths for a career

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Categories: Jobs

The generation born from the mid-1970s to the 2000s, known as the “PlayStation Generation” or the “Millennials,” is today characterized by employers as unprepared for the real world, unrealistic about what they should get, and uninformed about what’s out there. The lack of a strong work ethic is also alarming to employers.

Unfortunately, the answer won’t likely be found on Facebook or in a video game.

The fact of the matter is that a lack of awareness about career options prevents the Millennials from pursuing the training they need to qualify for better-paying jobs. Exposing youth to different careers is a critical task that we have failed to do and our industries and children are suffering as a result.

And as baby boomers retire in large numbers in the coming two decades, the need for trained workers, particularly in technical fields, will be greater than ever before. Businesses need to get involved if they want to solve the oncoming workforce crisis.

Two main issues need to be addressed. The first is the lack of knowledge about what opportunities are out there, and what is required to get the better-paying jobs. Today’s youths receive little exposure to the real world before they finish high school. There are many industries that lack the next generation of young workers to fill the jobs being vacated by retiring workers. CEOs soon discover that young people are not aware of these good-paying jobs or have the skill sets to handle them.

Young people simply don’t know how to seek out the training they might need.

There are solutions. Many high schools offer career fairs. These fairs are effective, but without some hands-on experience, it’s still very difficult for students to get a feeling for the work involved. Another solution may be to supplement the career fairs with factory tours, job shadowing, or internships. San Bernardino County has partnered with others in the community to create an online career exploration website at www.careerquest.tv.

Career-focused Regional Occupation Program (ROP) classes, which are found in high schools, can serve as career exploration opportunities for both college-bound and non-college-bound students. A student can take an ROP class about automotive technology and decide whether that is a field they wish to pursue as a career. They can then pursue further technical training by enrolling in certificate programs at local community colleges or professional automotive schools such as UTI in Rancho Cucamonga.

The second issue is addressing the stigma attached to career technical education. ROP classes do not receive the same level of respect as college-prep classes. Many students, even those not planning to go to college, avoid these classes. The majority of the classes are shop classes and many kids simply don't want to get their hands "dirty." Educators, with the help and support of concerned businesses and parents, should work toward removing the stigma attached to ROP classes.

ROP classes can benefit college-bound students. Practical classes in automotive technology or computer repair expose students to the engineering field. A small-business management class is perfect for someone considering an MBA. Students discover in advance if their chosen fields are not quite what they imagined. This allows them time to explore other career paths before making major investments in post-secondary education. Some ROP classes are very advanced and the skills they teach are in high demand, including computer aided drafting (CAD), geographic information systems (GIS), and American Sign Language. Course credits may be transferable to some community colleges, and can satisfy a university's "A-G" subject requirements.

A growing trend in ROP class attendance is the number of students in their 20s. These are often youth who spent years working at low-level retail jobs and have discovered what others are making in the more technical occupations.

The opportunity for career exploration can help students at all levels find direction for their future. Career technical training in high schools provides non-college-bound students marketable skills and gives our industries the workforce they need. College-bound students can find ways to benefit from ROP and other technical training before they make the transition to advanced education.

The message for businesses, educators, parents and others is to get involved with our youth, provide guidance and help them avoid wasting years trying to figure that out on their own.

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