

Looking Toward the Future: A Parent's Role in Career Development

Perhaps you've heard this question around the holiday dinner table: "So, what do you want to do when you finish school?" For seniors this discussion is far more likely and comes with a dose of reality that the college experience is coming to an end.

First-year students may feel insulated by the years still in front of them. Regardless of where a student sits in the progression of a college education, however, looking toward the future can be nerve-racking and exciting.

The career search is not just a one-time transaction that occurs in the senior year.

It's a culmination of a variety of activities. Employers like candidates who are self-aware, knowledgeable about the opportunities that they are pursuing and who have demonstrated an application of critical skills.



Let's face it, parents have a lot of influence over the decisions students make. We know that students look to their parents for direction, advice and consultation regarding careers. So what's a parent to do in helping their student navigate the career planning process and the thought of life after college?

1. Encourage your student to explore widely.

Encouraging your student to take a wide variety of classes is a great start. Students change their minds about many things during their time in college, including interests, majors and career aspirations. Even the most focused first-years should be pushed to challenge themselves with a mixture of diverse courses. This will position them much better to change their path should they choose.

2. Push them to ask questions.

Most 18-to-20-year olds have a pretty narrow frame of reference regarding careers. Of course they know about doctors, lawyers or engineers but their exposure is otherwise pretty limited. Recommend that they ask questions of your friends, neighbors and other members of your community. Most colleges also provide information regarding their alumni so, encourage your student to be in touch with a graduate. It is very helpful for college students to get a sense of what students before them have gone on to do with their careers. It helps make the world of work that much more real.

3. Send your student to work.

Internships are a great way to build skills and to network. Many employers not only value internships but they use them as a way to recruit talent into their organizations. Spending at least one summer in an internship will widen your student's frame of reference and potentially sharpen his or her career goals.

4. Guide them to resources.

Push your student to take advantage of resources. Students should tap into advisors, faculty and, of course, the Career Services office. Be sure your student has investigated all the resources available. Trusted campus staff, from residence life staff to coaches to supervisors, can help point them in the direction of helpful career-related resources.

5. Be a partner in the process.

It is awfully tempting for a parent to want to make it as easy as possible for their student to make decisions and become successful adults. A great way to be a career partner is to empower, encourage and help guide, but not direct students. Serve as a sounding board and brainstorm ideas with them. This can be a difficult process, but well worth it when your student finds a satisfying career path in the end.