**Monday, November 5, 2012 CERIC (Canadian education and research institute for counselling)**

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**7 Career Conversation Tips for Parents of Post-Secondary Students**

by Chapter Executive Jennifer Caron, M.Ed., CCC

Ever imagined your child becoming a Space Tour Guide?



Some students begin their first year with definite career ideas and a plan while others are uncertain about their future. Frequently, students will change their plan – either they discover they are no longer interested in their original goal or they are not able to meet the requirements for entrance into a specific field. Career decision-making can be very difficult. Here are some ways you can enhance the career conversations you have with your child and help guide them in the career decision-making process:

**1. Show Support.**Education today is very expensive and parents who pay the bills may want to see a return on their investments. However, finding career success in today's global economy requires much more than a decision that is solely motivated by parental pressure. When speaking with your child encourage them to pursue work that aligns with their skills, interests, values and personality. Larry Smith, an instructor of economics at the University of Waterloo explains that:

*“Once, you needed to show no particular interest in your work, only a willingness to work hard for your pay. Now, you must show genuine interest in your work.*

*Tomorrow, you will have to demonstrate passion.”*

Consequently, it is more important today to support your child in their career interests and decisions. Remember, the happy history student may have an easier time finding work than the disgruntled business student.

**2. Be Informed.**Arm yourself with career relevant information - with more than 2 million job titles in Canada, it is likely that your son or daughter has overlooked an appropriate career. Only 20% of occupations in this country are regulated (e.g. Doctor, Lawyer, and Engineer), which means the majority of jobs today do not have specific requirements for entry. While opportunities may require certain educational backgrounds or additional, specialized training; more often than not, a student’s specific academic discipline is the least important thing that employers are looking for. Today, “employability” means having marketable skills that businesses want, being able to communicate those skills and carrying them from job to job as the demands of the labour market change.

**3. Start Early.**It’s never too early for your child to be thinking about their future. Many students are dealing with adjustment and transition concerns and other academic demands; the thought of career planning may seem fairly remote. There are many steps your child can take early on to prepare themselves for their future career. Encourage them to seek out extracurricular & volunteer activities in year one, to learn about experiential and service learning opportunities, and to start thinking about summer jobs that will help them develop important skills and learn more about the world of work. Often the best summer job experiences are posted in the fall of first year. Students who are thinking early about their career by integrating valuable summer work and other activities will be ahead of the game.

**4. Encourage Balance.**All work and no fun make for an unhappy student. Marks are important and doing the best you can in a course is an excellent goal, but equally important is being involved in campus and community activities. Employers inform us that marks are not always what will help a student find work; in fact, verbal communication skills, analytical skills, a strong work ethic and teamwork skills are cited as the most important candidate qualities by employers across Canada.

**5. Consider Internships, Co-ops Other Experiential Opportunities.**Many schools offer opportunities for internships, co-ops or other related experiential activities. Having these experiences as a goal will provide direction and incentive to your child. It is an excellent way to learn about the job market, acquire hands-on experiences, and test out new skills and interests. It will allow them to better assess whether they have made the right career choice and could enhance their career success. Often students are hired by the company that gave them their internship experience upon graduation.

**6. Understand the Value of Outside the Classroom Activities.**Encourage your children to get involved in activities outside of the academic bubble. Students can learn the art of networking and socializing through interactions with friends and the people they will meet when they get involved in the community. Although students spend plenty of hours in class, it is what they do outside of class that often really sticks. These outside-of-class activities lead to improved communication skills, self-discipline, and increased comfort in dealing with others. These skills are important to one’s identity and will aid in career planning. New graduates are more likely to find work after graduation if they are able to effectively develop a network and are comfortable connecting with others. Developing an interpersonal comfort level will provide an excellent foundation for career success.

**7. Realize Career Choice can be a Life Choice.**A career choice is an important one and will impact on a student’s future life style. Many questions need to be asked about that choice but often are not. More time is spent on shopping for a new car than on a career. We may go to several dealerships, do countless hours of online research at home, talk to friends and family members and draft a new budget. We ask ourselves is this car a reflection of me? Is it the right colour? Style? Will it fit all of my needs? A similar process can be applied to choosing a career. A career choice is of course more complicated as students consider the future and life after school. Integrating life and career in a holistic way is complex and may require the assistance. Start the conversation with your child early on and help them access the supports they may need.

**Jennifer Caron** is a career counsellor at Western University. She supports students in their career development and with job search issues; and assists them with career decision-making, career planning, goal setting and overcoming barriers to employment. She also facilitates a variety of career development workshops, group presentations, and coordinates special outreach projects to incorporate career planning in to other facets of the University experience. For the last three summers, Jenn has worked with the Summer Academic Orientation (SAO) program at Western to facilitate a daily career workshop called “Return on Investment: Helping your child prepare for a career after graduation” for the parents of incoming students