



Questioning the "Right" School - and Profession



By William Peniston, MD

SOMEONE COMMENTED that helping one's child find and enter the "right" college or university was replete with difficulty and uncertainty. This provoked a discussion of what a "right" school is.

Is it a large, "big name" like Harvard, Yale, Cal, or Stanford, where beginning classes number 500 students and the only faculty contact is with graduate student teaching assistants?

Or would it be better to attend a smaller school where there is regular personal contact with faculty, some of whom may also serve as mentors. We thought the difference might depend upon the student's interest in using the "big name" of a school for leverage into a highly paid position versus one's interest in identifying a career that evokes happiness.

Several of us cited examples of our children and grandchildren, and even of ourselves, who changed their objectives late during education or even after its completion.

We also gave examples of acquaintances that had spent many years studying for highly skilled, and highly paying, professions only to discover they hated the actual practice of those professions.

And we wondered about those physicians we know who have told us they counseled their children not to study medicine because it is no longer enjoyable.

So we pondered several questions. Do the "big name" schools really provide the best education, or just a better doorway to money? Which of the two types of school is best at helping students discover their most enjoyable vocation? Are there other processes more helpful in identifying that goal?

What about such things as psychological testing, or leaving school for a year to work in the "real world?" (Apparently there is a school that actually asks its students to do just that.)

What about a universal draft that requires all persons between the ages of 18 and 20 to serve one or two years in some type of service organization such as the Peace Corps, Red Cross, Habitat for Humanity, etc. or, heaven forbid - the military? Such a program might give our bored young people something to do and thereby reduce the violence and destructive behavior that seems so prevalent.

Well, it's obvious our little group came up with no recommendations, earth-shaking or otherwise. We did feel, however, that many students are unsure of what they wish to do with their lives and may not be getting the help they need to decide.

Also, we wonder how happy our colleagues are in practicing medicine. There are a couple of reasons why we suspect a large number of you don't enjoy it.

The first is cited above in the counseling of your children. The second is the large number

of physicians who completely sever all ties with medicine when they retire.

What do you think? How happy are you with your chosen profession?

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