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Trade apprenticeships: pathwaysto prosperity and happiness

by FRANK STRONACH

A new survey last week showed young Canadians were among the least happy group of people in the country based on age and also one of the most discontented in the developed world.

It's not hard to understand why young Canadians aren't jumping for joy these days.

For one, many of them have abandoned the hope of one day owning their own home.

According to a Statistics Canada report published in March, overheated housing prices are ?casting a shadow over the homeownership dream for many households ? and, in particular, for young families.?

But the fading dream of home ownership is not the only reason young Canadians are gloomy nowadays: they're also having difficulty finding good-paying jobs. Many of them are college or university graduates who thought a degree was the ticket to a lucrative career.

Pursuing a trade apprenticeship, however, may have been the better option for some of these students. A number of trades pay higher-than-average salaries ? especially for young people just starting out in their career.

Consider the other advantages to learning a skilled trade.

The average debt incurred by students who pursue a college or university degree has been steadily climbing for the past two decades, according to a Statistics Canada report published in March.

But because tuition costs for trade school are significantly lower than college or university, students typically shoulder little or no student debt after graduating and find a job much more quickly, according to Finishing Trades Institute of Ontario.

So given all of the financial benefits ? not to mention the fact that trade apprenticeship students can often ?earn while you learn? ? it's not surprising that enrollment in skilled trades programs is booming, according to Statistics Canada.

A skilled trade was my road to success in life: it gave me the chance to open my own business and I was able to build that business into a successful multinational, Magna International Inc., with operations throughout the world and more than $40 billion in annual sales.

When I was chairman of Magna, a lot of bankers, lawyers and automotive executives came through the doors of our head office in fancy suits, briefcases in hand. But the visitors who came in wearing blue overalls ? Magna's factory managers and assistant managers ? often made far more in annual income than the ?suits? who showed up for business meetings or worked in the head office.

Beyond providing good-paying and fulfilling careers for many young Canadians, we need technically skilled trades people in order for the economy to function. Trades people build our homes and roads and cars, grow and cook our food, and keep the lights and water running inside our schools, factories and offices.

It's why I believe we should require students in their final two years of high school to be exposed to one or more technical trades at businesses outside the schools. Under my proposal, students would gain hands-on training in four different trades over two years in a wide range of skilled trades such as bricklaying, hairstyling, carpentry, and the culinary arts.

Skilled trades training for young Canadians is one of the key principles in the economic charter of rights I've been championing for the past year. It will give Canada the skilled workforce it needs to grow our economy ? and it will give young Canadians the means to earn a good income and enjoy a higher standard of living.

To learn more about how an economic charter could help revitalize our economy, contact info@economiccharter.ca.