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Export date: Fri Oct 30 0:02:33 2026 / +0000 GMT

Working in the trades

by BRIAN LOCKHART

One of the most stressful times in life, has got to be when you are finishing your final year of high school, and you realize that when you graduate, it's going to be a whole new life situation.

At the end of grade 12, many students, and I was in that same boat, simply have no idea what career they want to try to get into. It can be very daunting to think you have to choose something that will possibly define the rest of your life.

How do you choose a career path if you have no experience in that job, and really don't know if you will like it, until you actually start doing the job?

Some students, and I know a couple, had clearly defined goals, started preparing in high school, and went on to achieve those goals and are very happy.

I know others, that have taken a year off and have basic jobs to earn money, but just don't know what to do next. It can be a tough couple of years figuring it all out.

Most people do not really follow their passions and real interests.

No little kid, when asked, ?What do you want to be when you grow up?? ever replied, ?I want to be an accountant.?

I attended a skilled trades event recently in Orangeville that was geared towards graduating students and introduced them to possible career opportunities after school.

There was a lot of heavy machinery and examples of different jobs in the trades that provide on-the-job training and apprenticeships. There were also service groups like the military, police, and fire fighters.

For a while, I just observed and watched how students were attracted to different displays and took a real interest in what was going on.

During the last half of the 20th century and into the 2000s, the trades tended to be regarded as jobs for people who couldn't get into university.

A lot of that attitude comes directly out of the education system, where students were taught that if you don't go to university you are a failure. I knew a lot of kids who were told by their ?guidance counsellor', ?you don't have the grades, you'll never amount to anything.?

For some reason, the education system determined that you are only getting educated if you are sitting in a classroom taking notes.

The truth is, every time you take a piano lesson, you are being educated. Every time you read a history book on your own time, you are being educated. Every martial arts class you take, and every athletic game you compete in, teaches you something. Every time your grandfather took you fishing, you learned something. Every farm kid receives training that they won't get anywhere else.

Every job you have gives you an education, and it's likely the on-the-job training you receive will serve you better than sitting in a classroom trying to figure out calculus.

My grade 8, home room teacher, was a person who probably should have chosen a different career path. She already had a reputation

as a loud-mouthed child hater well before I had the misfortune of being assigned to her class.

After a full year of being yelled at every day and told how stupid we all were on a daily, basis, she handed out the forms we needed to select our courses for our first year in high school.

Her words of encouragement to our class were ?If you don't choose the right classes in grade nine, and follow through for the next four years, and go to university like her, and become a ?professional' like her, we would be failures for the rest of our lives.?

The thought of turning out ?like her' did not inspire me or any of my classmates to follow much of her advice.

The schools seem to be taking a different approach now. I guess someone finally realized that you can be successful and not have a degree, and that education goes far beyond the walls of a school.

Students must now have volunteer hours as part of the requirement to graduate. Schools realized that experience volunteering with organizations is a valuable lesson.

They also realized that going into the trades can provide a solid career and a healthy income, and more schools are now promoting those options to students.

A smart teacher should recognize that fact that although a student is not good in math, they have other aptitudes and natural skills that should be explored and encouraged.

A smart school will help guide students to post-secondary life, not discourage them because they struggle to find the answer to ?x=y.'