**Shaping Your Future Worker**

**Ken Canfield, Ph.D.**

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Dad, don't you wonder-and worry-about your child's future career path? If your kids are like mine, people started characterizing them from an early age: "Wow, she has long fingers. She'll be a great piano player some day." Or, "He loves to push buttons and figure out how things work. I bet he'll grow up to be an engineer."

Now, we know that many complicated factors determine a child's future. And the future is uncertain. But that doesn't mean we can't start shaping and visioning with our children-even at a young age.

Children who are given opportunities to explore a wide variety of interests and hobbies are more likely to get involved in a job they love. As they grow, we can help them identify and apply their talents. Here are a few practical ideas:

1. **Help your child brainstorm about career possibilities**-and don't wait until high school. Help him match up his interests with a certain line of work. If he likes music, point out that there's much more to it than performing. He could be a sound technician, or a producer. He could work in radio, or he could be a composer. Use the library or Internet to expand his possibilities.
2. **Expose your child to jobs that might interest her.** Take her to meet someone who has that job, and encourage her to keep in touch. Take a tour, and ask lots of questions about the process of turning out a product or performing a service. Help expose her to what surgeons do, for example, so she knows what it's really like before she spends years finding out it isn't what she thought.
3. **Point out less visible occupations**-like airplane mechanic, surveyor, social worker, computer programmer, or restaurant manager. Help them see that there's more than the firefighters, nurses, police officers, or professional athletes that kids commonly see and idolize.
4. **Try not to talk negatively about your work.** Those comments under your breath make a big impression, and shape your child's ideas about work. Think of something positive to say about your job.
5. **Keep dreams alive.** As a child, Chad had dreams of becoming a pro tennis player. That dream didn't work out, but it led him to a fulfilling career. He developed a surface for tennis courts, and eventually the rubber used on the playgrounds you see at fast-food restaurants around the country.

Some children do grow up to be sports stars, but they could also be a coach, sports journalist, or play-by-play announcer. Some children do become movie stars, but the movie industry also needs lighting technicians, screenwriters, set designers, make-up artists, and so on. Encourage your children's dreams and you may be surprised where it leads.
6. **Help your child see the opportunities in front of her.** If she likes to skate, for example, she could be a teacher's assistant or get a part time job at the rink. Show your child that there are jobs that involve the things they enjoy.
7. **Encourage an entrepreneurial spirit.** Those baby-sitting and lawn mowing jobs teach your kids that time and effort have their rewards. Even young children can begin to learn this by helping at your summer garage sale. Sure, not every lemonade stand will be a huge success, but those setbacks can be even more valuable learning opportunities. Why didn't it work? What could he do differently next time? Lemonade stand lessons at age eight can still be used at age twenty-eight.
8. **Help your child choose a career for the right reasons.** There are many wrong reasons. Money can't buy lasting satisfaction. Fame is fleeting. And even though it may be gratifying to see a child follow your career path, it's much more important that he choose something that matches his own gifts and interests.