



Don't Send Your Kids To College: Reality Check for College and Career Planning ()

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Today, when nearly seventy percent of Americans have attended college and thirty-three percent are college graduates, you would think that our economy would at least rise above the 1950-1970 post-World War II levels. But it hasn't, and as a matter of fact, the number of graduates may have no bearing on general economic prosperity. The fact is that employers are looking for more than just college and technical school diplomas. Some employers are saying that there is a mismatch of both skills and work behaviors in the graduates produced by American schools at all levels. The low-level jobs that employ many graduates of both technical and academic colleges don't seem to justify the expense or the effort. With results like this, why does the college fantasy continue to exert its fascination? The fantasy endures because bad news has a hard time breaking through the shimmering wall of college marketing. Successful marketing has little trouble spinning the truth that college once was a dependable route to social and economic success. The basic principle of sales and marketing is to identify the need and fill it. The need has always been there, but it wasn't always connected to college. The need is parents' natural concern about raising their children to become independent adults. The parents have always educated their children. For most of human history they taught their own skills to their children. Modern and universal education is only one hundred-fifty years old; universal college education is the real newcomer at sixty years. Since World War II, getting a "good" job came to be viewed as the result of a college education, with college dividing the management from the factory worker. Take that idea to about 1970, and the college diploma was a magic scroll that opened doors. By then, somehow getting the diploma had become more important than the education and competence that it was supposed to guarantee. As the Wizard of Oz tells the Scarecrow, "Back where I come from, we have universities, seats of great learning, where men go to become great thinkers. And when they come out, they think deep thoughts and with no more brains than you have. But they have one thing you haven't got: a diploma." This is where we are today, we have managed to separate education from the practical needs of work and the skills for a job.

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