

Theme: Get a Job!
Find a life!

Question: What is the value of work and employment in leading one toward a life vocation?

Teens and parents in conversation

HomeWord



Teen Talk *by Leann Barden*

Although it's cold and snowy now, it won't be long until we hear the sounds of spring. We will hear the chirping of birds, the chatter of squirrels, the buzzing of bees . . . and the whining of teenagers everywhere. Spring, especially the Easter season, is the time when many parents boot their teens into the real world and send them looking for summer jobs.

Last year, several of my friends were a little bitter about starting their first summer jobs. They couldn't understand why their parents were making them work; I couldn't understand what they were upset about.

I worked at a Culver's restaurant over the past summer and enjoyed most of my time there. It got me out of the house—delaying the onset of summer boredom—and helped me make new friends. It was my first job that allowed the government to collect taxes and social security from me. Even though I hated losing money, I felt an odd sense of satisfaction from doing my part along with other tax-paying American citizens, even if I did

complain with the best of them. I was also glad to start supporting myself in a small way. I was no longer living off my parents and society.


As I gave back to my parents by buying my own extravagances, I guess you could say I was earning my freedom. My

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parents saw that I could handle more responsibility, so they gave me more privileges. I was allowed to use the car more often and to stay out a little later. Work provided some cash to go out with friends as well as a start to my college fund. Youth is the best time to work because young people usually don't have bills or mortgages to pay. There is only a short time in life when you can spend your money on your dreams and not be dragged into financial trouble.

A job has other practical rewards beside money and satisfaction. It provides real life experience. It helps hone application skills, provides a reference for future jobs, and teaches important people skills. I don't yet know of a single ▼

Parent Talk *by Leif Kehrwald*



Think for a moment and bring to mind one person in your life who genuinely inspires you. Not necessarily a famous person but someone you know personally.

I am thinking of a long-ago friend who recently wandered back into my life. He literally showed up at my doorstep one

Vocation is our response to an invitation into partnership with God.

evening, and we talked well into the night. While his profession and lifestyle of running a traveling carnival are completely foreign to me, his gifts of storytelling and generosity leave me spellbound. All of life comes alive through his romantic eyes, and I can't help but to get caught up in it! He transforms me with his simple wisdom.

Does he have a vocation? Of course. And your inspirational person does also.

Vocation is a call to partnership with God on behalf of our neighbor. Sometimes our neighbor sleeps in the room next door or even on the other side of the bed. Vocation means cooperating with God's work in the world and finding a purpose for

being that is related to the purposes of God.

Occasionally you hear people refer to their vocation without their realizing it. "I guess it's my calling in life to endure parenthood." I heard this comment recently from a truly gifted and wonder-

ful mother, and I wanted to respond,

"No, it's clear to me that your calling is to be an inspirational steward of your child's journey until she is ready to be her own steward."

How would you describe *your* vocation? This is by no means an easy question to answer. One's vocation comes from deep within but is often more clearly seen and discerned by others.

Vocation is not necessarily our job, our work, our occupation, or even our avocation, though we might hear it expressed that way. When it comes to career, we might hear, "I've worked hard shaping my career, and I'm proud of what I've accomplished." I can reply, "No one could have done what you have done in your field, but your greatest accomplishment has ▼

Teen Talk *continued*

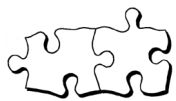
teen who has acquired the people skills and patience to be a teacher, firefighter, accountant, or any kind of professional. Working teaches professionalism and competence as well.

Although some jobs can be boring or seem unrewarding to teens, they can be the perfect stepping stones to a better life. Working has taught me independence and budgeting—skills I will certainly need for college. Working has also taught me understanding and respect for others. For example, I have a greater appreciation for how hard some low-income families work because they are too determined and proud to just sit back

and let the welfare checks roll in. Working brings me that much closer to being an independent adult, not just a little kid who has to be babysat.

As spring creeps around the corner, I want to give this piece of advice to my peers: Stop complaining. Get up, get out, and find a job. Dedicate yourself to working for your dreams down the road. Oh, and one other thing: Would you like fries with that?

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What If . . . ?

Along with all the other aspects of everyday living, the experience of work has the potential to become a significant locus for the revelation of God. How can work—whether uplifting or boring—be an integral part of one's journey toward holiness?

What if the act of work, whatever its nature, were seen as a creative act in union with the Creator, that actually builds up the earth and helps form a new human family? What if all this toil and labor were viewed as very concrete ways to continue the redemptive activity of Jesus, a specific mode of dying and rising with him? What if the spiritual lives of millions of Christians were expanded to include their whole lives, including the daily round of work? What if?

(Elizabeth Dryer, *The Catholic World*, July–August 1994, as quoted in *Marriage and the Spirituality of Intimacy*, by Leif Kehrwald [Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1996], pages 86 and 90.)

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Parent Talk *continued*

been showing us success with integrity and grace."

Vocation is our response to an invitation into partnership with God. It involves our work, to be sure, but also our leisure, our relationships, and our resources formed into a tapestry and put at the disposal of God's purposes.

Coming to grips with one's vocation may sound burdensome, but actually it can be quite compelling and freeing.

The excellence we are called to in vocation is never based on competition with others. Each person is singularly and uniquely gifted, and it is exactly those gifts that God calls us to use for the benefit of others. There is no shortage of ways to be a partner with God.



Finding Balance

For some, work is fulfilling. To work is to contribute to the fabric of human existence. . . . How can work and career remain a source of esteem and growth without becoming the sole source? How do we keep it from enveloping our lives? For many, this is an ongoing challenge of balancing the rush and satisfaction of work achievement with the relational responsibilities of marriage and home life.

Many find it easier to "succeed" at work than at home. For one thing, it's easier to know what success is on the job than at home or in marriage. Many, therefore, slip into spending more time and their best energy at work.

Others keep their work in balance. They realize the necessity and benefits of employment, but they arrange their workload and expectations to reflect that the job is not the most important thing in their lives.

(Leif Kehrwald, *Marriage and the Spirituality of Intimacy* [Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1996], pages 83–84.)

Consequently we are truly free to rejoice in the unique gifts and graces of others. An added benefit here is that we are freed from the false constraints of having to be all things to all people. When we know our gifts, we also become comfortable with your limitations.

Vocation is also the opposite of workaholism. We are free to seek a reasonable balance between work and leisure, and in our vocation we are freed from the tyranny of time.

Once we are in touch with our vocation, our unique partnership with God, we will benefit from these great life assets.

This article is adapted from Marriage and the Spirituality of Intimacy, by Leif Kehrwald (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1996), pages 88–89.