

paradigm
education

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DISCUSSION & REVIEW QUESTIONS:

- At the beginning of the video, Mr. Kirk contends that college, "...can be a worthwhile pursuit under the right circumstances. If you want to be a doctor, or an architect, for example, it's obviously a necessity. But look through the typical college syllabus and it's clear that most of the majors, not to mention classes, are a waste of time – and money." What might the 'right circumstances' be for students, and how might families go about determining the 'right circumstances' for a family member to go to college? What makes many classes and majors at a college a waste of time and money? Explain.
- Mr. Kirk goes on to ask, "So why do responsible adults who only want the best for their children and are usually cautious with their hard-earned money, squander it on such a bad investment? Worse, why would they send their son or daughter to a school to learn to reject the values they, the parents, hold dear?" How would you answer his questions? Explain.
- Later in the video, Mr. Kirk notes that, "According to a Georgetown University Study, there are 30 million jobs paying over \$55,000 a year that don't require a college degree. Learn a skill like welding or plumbing or a dozen other trades and you'll never be looking for a job. The jobs will be looking for you. We're talking \$50 an hour or more. Six figure income after five years and no debt. Consider the military. You learn essential skills, and again, no debt. Or go into sales. You don't need a sociology degree for that." Why do you think that so many high school students don't seriously consider going into a trade job after high school instead of going to college? What do you think would be better for most people- spending four years getting a Classics degree from a prestigious university and being \$80,000 in debt or spending four years learning to be a plumber and earning \$80,000 a year? Explain. Why do you think that many people place a higher prestige and value on someone who is a college graduate that can't find work over someone who is in a trade job and able to provide well for their family? Explain.
- As part of encouraging potential students to figure out what will work best for them, Mr. Kirk suggests for students to, "Ask yourself if you really need to go to college," and possibly to, "Delay college for a year or longer. If more graduating high school seniors would do this – not jump into college immediately after high school – college curriculums would improve, and nonsense like safe spaces would disappear. Why? Because students who had spent a year or longer in the real world, wouldn't put up with it." In what ways might delaying going to college be helpful to a potential college student? Why would college curriculums improve if more high school students delayed going to college?
- Towards the end of the video, Mr. Kirk suggests for potential students to, "Get a job, any job, for a year before starting college... One year isn't going to make a difference as to whether or not you succeed in life but waiting tables or stacking boxes or whatever you do for a year will almost certainly change your attitude about a lot of things; like how hard it is to earn a dollar and how easy it is for the government to take that dollar away. You will also develop a new appreciation for the privilege of going to college. And, you'll be much more likely to be immune to the BS." Do you agree with Mr. Kirk's position that not going to college immediately after high school will not have nearly the possible significance to one's future that having a job right afterwards could? Why or why not? In what ways might having a job before college change one's attitude towards college? Explain. What do you think Mr. Kirk means by being 'immune to the BS?' Explain.

EXTEND THE LEARNING:

CASE STUDY: Mike Rowe WORKS

INSTRUCTIONS: Read the article “We’ve got a PR problem,” then answer the questions that follow.

- What has America become disconnected from? What do millions of well-intentioned parents view apprenticeships and on-the-job opportunities as? What has the push for higher education and the removal of vocational arts from high schools nationwide laid the foundation for? What has the cost of tuition soared faster than? How many student loan borrowers are there, and how much do they owe, collectively? What does the U.S. culture reaffirm, bit by bit? What does Mr. Rowe state that we have to reconnect the average American with, and why? What did Mr. Rowe do in 2008, and why? What is the mission of the mikeroweWORKS Foundation, and what do they do? What is the S.W.E.A.T. Pledge, and what does it do? How many skilled jobs are unfulfilled because no one is trained or willing to do them? How many graduates with jobs aren’t working in their field of study?
- Do you think that most college students today value college for the opportunity to become better educated in a particular field and to increase their chances of becoming gainfully employed when finished? Why or why not? Do you think that Mr. Kirk would support the decision of many people to support and engage with the mikeroweWORKS Foundation? Why or why not?
- Why do you think that so many parents equate chances for success exclusively with getting a college degree? Explain. What do you think that one should do in order to plan for a successful future, with or without college? How do you define ‘succeeding in life?’



QUIZ

IS COLLEGE WORTH IT?

1. When can college be a worthwhile pursuit?

- a. When already suffering from crippling debt.
- b. Under the right circumstances.
- c. When seeking to validate a victimhood mentality.
- d. None of the above.

2. What's wrong with not being an academic type?

- a. You can't succeed in college.
- b. You can't be happy.
- c. Your family can't be proud of you.
- d. Nothing.

3. According to a Georgetown University Study, there are _____ jobs paying over \$55,000 a year that don't require a college degree.

- a. 10 million
- b. 20 million
- c. 30 million
- d. 40 million

4. Instead of asking if one needs to go to college, many people matriculate into higher education because _____.

- a. it's expected
- b. it sounds like fun
- c. it's an escape from mom and dad
- d. Any or all of the above.

5. Waiting one year to go to college will make a difference as to whether or not you succeed in life.

- a. True
- b. False



QUIZ - ANSWER KEY

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<https://www.mikeroweworks.org/about/>

We've got a PR problem.



What's the problem?

We've made work the enemy.

America has become slowly but undeniably disconnected from the most fundamental elements of civilization—food, energy, education, and the very nature of work itself.

Over the last 30 years, America has convinced itself that the best path for the most people is an expensive, four-year degree. Pop culture has glorified the “corner office job” while unintentionally belittling the jobs that helped build the corner office. As a result, our society has devalued any other path to success and happiness. Community colleges, trade schools, and apprenticeship programs are labeled as “alternative.” Millions of well-intended parents and guidance counselors see apprenticeships and on-the-job training opportunities as “vocational consolation prizes,” best suited for those not cut out for the brass ring: a four-year degree. The push for higher education has coincided with the removal of vocational arts from high schools nationwide. And the effects of this one-two punch have laid the foundation for a widening skills gap and massive student loan debt.

Today, the skills gap is wider than it’s ever been. The cost of college tuition has soared faster than the cost of food, energy, real estate, and health care. Student loan debt is the second highest consumer debt category in the United States with more than 44 million borrowers who collectively owe more than \$1.5 trillion. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, there are more than 7 million jobs available across the country, the majority of which don’t require a four-year degree. And still, we talk about millions of “shovel ready” jobs for a society that doesn’t encourage people to pick up a shovel. We keep lending money we don’t have to people who can’t pay it back for jobs that don’t exist. Bit by bit, our culture reaffirms the misguided

belief that a career in the skilled trades shouldn't be desired. And that lack of enthusiasm has reshaped our expectations of a "good job" into something that no longer resembles work.

Why does Mike give a crap?

He's addicted to paved roads, working electricity, and flushing toilets.

As an apprentice on the TV series *Dirty Jobs*, Mike Rowe traveled to every state and worked with plumbers, electricians, steamfitters, pipefitters, brick layers, farmers, fishers, and a bunch of other skilled workers who help keep our polite society humming along. They were individuals who found opportunity where no one else thought to look. They were entrepreneurs running successful businesses. They were happy people who managed to figure out a positive work-life balance. To his surprise, they didn't resemble the unflattering, blue-collar workers often portrayed in the media. This misperception resulted in an undeniable disparity between available skilled jobs and the unemployed local population. Week after week, Mike saw "Help Wanted" signs everywhere, even when unemployment took over news headlines. Our society didn't, and still doesn't, have a trained workforce standing by or willing to fill the positions that actually exist.

"Our crumbling infrastructure, our widening skills gap, the disappearance of vocational education, and the stratospheric rise in college tuition—these are not problems," Mike said. "These are symptoms of what we value. And right now, we have to reconnect the average American with the value of a skilled workforce. Only then, will the next generation aspire to do the work at hand."

In 2008, Mike created the mikeroweWORKS Foundation to launch a national PR campaign for skilled labor...more like a one-man crusade.

How do we change the prevailing misperception of skilled labor?

Make work cool again.

We're on a mission to help close the skills gap by challenging the stigmas and stereotypes that discourage people from pursuing the millions of available jobs. We're redefining the definition of a good education and a good job, because we don't think a four-year degree is the best path for the most people. We want people to understand the impact of skilled labor on their lives, and we're convinced that the solution has to start with a new appreciation for hard work.

Each year, we give away a modest pile of money through the **Work Ethic Scholarship Program** to help people get trained for skilled jobs that are in demand. We've proven that opportunities in the trades aren't alternatives to viable careers – they are viable careers. Through this program, we encourage people to learn a useful skill, and we reward those who demonstrate that they'll work their butts off. When it comes to hard work, there is no alternative. Since our inception, we've granted, or helped facilitate the granting of, more than \$5 million in Work Ethic scholarships and other like-minded programs or initiatives that also work to close the skills gap.

How do we define work ethic?

The S.W.E.A.T. Pledge.

Back in 2008, Mike wanted to find a way to articulate the qualities he values most. He ended up writing **The S.W.E.A.T. Pledge**, which stands for "**Skills and Work Ethic Aren't Taboo.**" It's a collection of beliefs that outlines the importance of work ethic, personal responsibility, delayed gratification, and a positive attitude that we believe every worker can benefit from embracing it. Full disclosure—it's not for

everyone, and that's okay with us. But anyone who applies for the Work Ethic Scholarship Program must agree with and sign it.

How about some good advice?

In the long history of bad advice, you'd have to look pretty hard to find something dumber than Work Smart Not Hard.

In 1977, a version of this poster hung in my guidance counselor's office and was part of a recruitment campaign for college. It was bad advice then, but today, it's just plain dangerous. Google, "Work Smart Not Hard," and you'll see just how far this idiotic cliché has wormed its way into our collective conscious over the last forty years. It's repeated daily by millions of people like some timeless chestnut of conventional wisdom. Is it possible we actually believe such nonsense? You bet it is.

Consider the reality of today's job market. We have a massive skills gap. Even with record unemployment, millions of skilled jobs are unfilled because no one is trained or willing to do them. Meanwhile, unemployment among college graduates is at an all-time high, and the majority of those graduates with jobs aren't even working in their field of study. Plus, they collectively owe \$1.5 trillion in student loans. \$1.5 TRILLION! And still, we push a four-year degree as the best way for the most people to find a successful career?

The evidence suggests we've taken some very bad advice and tried to separate hard work from success. Consequently, we've become profoundly disconnected from a critical part of our workforce. The skilled part. The part that keeps the lights on. That's just crazy. In a sane world, there should be posters hanging in high schools that reflect the reality of the situation we're in. Wouldn't it make more sense to promote Work Smart AND Hard?

So...with a little creative license (and no respect for the original), I'm pleased to present a new platitude with a different attitude. And if you'd like to help spread the word, I'll try to talk you into buying one. Posters are \$12, or as much as you want to give, and all proceeds go to the mikeroweWORKS Foundation.

- Mike Rowe