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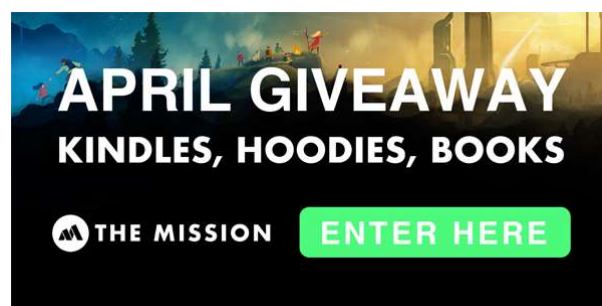
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How School Trains Us To Fail In The Real World

Originally published by Stephen Guise on his _personal website_*.*

> *I've never let my school interfere with my education.*
> *-Mark Twain*

The modern American school system does not encompass or define learning, it is a dominant subset of it. Do you want to know why I dislike school? Homework, sure, but more important than that are these four ways that school trains us to fail in "the real world."

Schools teach knowledge, but life requires wisdom

"Never mistake knowledge for wisdom. One helps you make a living; the other helps you make a life."—Sandara Carey

Instead of learning critical life skills on how to manage money, how to negotiate, or how to communicate, kids are mostly taught to memorize information. This is helpful to learn, but not at the cost of not learning critical life skills. Many people put these "life" skills on the onus of the parents to teach their kids, but **not all parents are qualified to teach these lessons**, and many assume that school is "enough learning." The school system would be a perfect place to learn these indispensable skills.

I can't give school a hall pass on this one, because it is set up as a core way that kids are prepared to live in the world. Why is it positioned as such when it lacks personal growth training, financial management training, communication training, emotional intelligence training, and healthy living training? Psychology is the closest course to any of these, but it's mostly in college and typically optional.

You could come up with a few examples of where these skills are taught in school, or where some wisdom is imparted by a particularly great teacher. But this is a general problem of focus that schools have. Schools are not set up to teach us what matters most.

School (noun)—A place where students suck on an information teat instead of learning how to feed themselves.

Here's what I would love to see changed. What do you think?

1. Classes for important life skills—money management, interpersonal communication, miscellaneous psychology, habits, goals, etc.

2. Incorporation into existing classes—in math, talk about smart credit card usage to avoid freaking 18% interest rates, how to build credit, how to pick the right health insurance, why new cars are a horrible investment, etc.

3. Start teaching this sooner than college. Not everyone goes to college, but everyone needs to know this stuff.

School is an unsuitable learning environment for many jobs

For those that say school is not the place to impart wisdom to youngsters, but to prepare them for the workplace, I hear ya, but sorry. You just walked into a nasty trap with that point of view. If school is to prepare us for a career, then why is it that it's absolutely horrible at accomplishing that?

Let's look at some stats that make colleges cringe (from a Mckinsey consulting firm report):

Warning: these stats are disturbing…

- In 2011, 1.5 million, or **53.6%** of college grads under age 25 were out of work or underemployed.

- And for those that do have jobs? **48%** of employed U.S. college grads are in jobs that require less than a four-year degree.

- **30%** of college graduates don't feel college prepared them for the world of work.

- **Six times** as many graduates are working in retail or hospitality as had originally planned.

It used to be that apprenticeships were the norm; you'd learn the hands-on skills and expertise from a mature worker in your field. The downside was that back then, it was more like, "hey kid, you're going to be a carpenter because that's what your family has always done." Today we have more choices, but with it has come an inferior form of learning. Most professions, even today's digitally-based jobs, need hands-on training and mentorship.

Programming boot camps are popping up, showing how horrible the current school model is. In 2–3 months, 90% or more of graduates have a job making more than $80,000 a year (within just a few months of graduation). Correct me if I'm wrong, but isn't that better than the typical college's "study for four years and wait tables to get by when you graduate jobless" plan? And yes, the data is coming to back up that statement. Read on.

Programming boot camps are old-school intense apprenticeships where students learn to code from knowledgeable programmers already working in the field. It's all hands-on "real world" work, and the graduates are highly valued for the skills they possess when they enter the job market. I hope this emerging format continues to grow and expand into other areas as an alternative to college. Even if you disagree with everything I've said, competition is a good thing and will promote the improvement of schools.
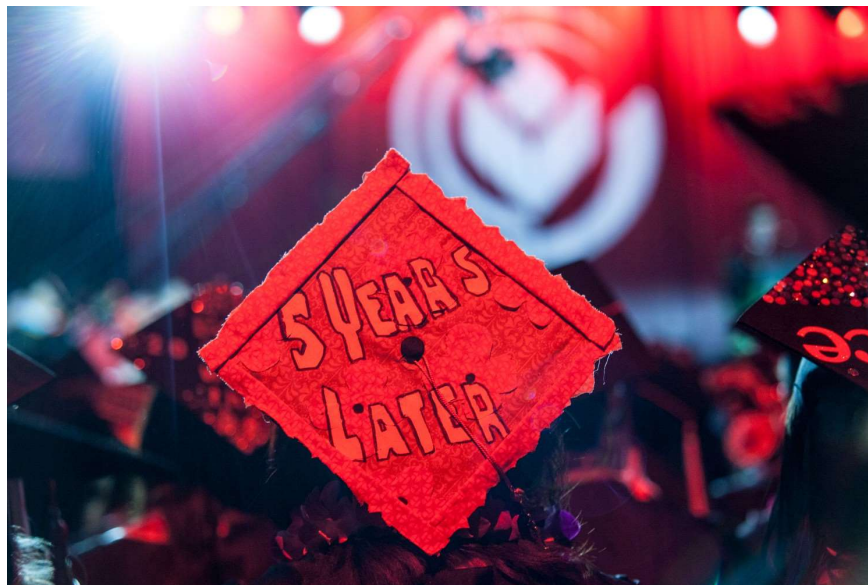

Photo by Twenty20.

College claims to be the safe, sure way for a great career (it's not)

Everyone must learn at some point that nobody cares much about their "potential."

When a company selects from a sea of faces and they all have identical or similar degrees, the value of those degrees shrinks, and they will look for the people who can do what they need right now. That's exactly what we're seeing, and the 2008 recession amplified it. And don't count on them *seeing your potential* like I did.

Example: Candidate A has 95% overall potential but can only do 15% of the job now—she must be trained. Candidate B has 63% overall potential but can do 85% of the job right now—he's ready to go. Candidate B gets the job almost every time.

Potential is exceedingly difficult to gauge accurately (see: Ryan Leaf), and so it is often not considered by employers. The answer to "where do you see yourself in 5 years?" question *doesn't quite* nail down your potential. Specific job skills, however, are readily knowable by employers with observation and questioning, and are given much greater weight in the world.

My Frustrating Story

I graduated with a B.S.B.A. in Finance in 2010. I'm not saying I expected a job to be handed to me on a golden platter, *but I thought I'd get a chance with reasonable effort over many months*. I searched for a year, had some interviews, and finally landed a sales floor job at Lowe's

for $10 an hour. *Sigh.* I was supposed to be happy about it because I had gotten a job in a lousy job market. But how could I accept losing so much time, money, and effort at college to work the same job I had in high school? I quit after the first day.

There was a trend. I noticed that for the jobs I wanted, my lack of experience was an issue. I learn things quickly, so I never saw it as an issue, but they did. One interview with a bank ended prematurely when it was found that my sales experience was "of a different kind." After a promising 2nd interview at an online brokerage company, in which I know I impressed the interviewers with my knowledge of investing, I received a call days later. They said that I was a top candidate, but they were withdrawing the opening altogether because they wanted someone who already had the required certifications.

Now I realize that this is common sense. Why pay $5,000 and take time to get someone certified when you can hire someone who is already certified and ready to go? As awesome as I think I am, there is almost always a plurality of people who can do a job well.

Some may think that employers love to train employees their way, but I think the truth is more often a "plug and play" preference. Would you rather hire someone who has proven they can do the job well, or someone who has a piece of paper that says they "might be a good employee, after training of course?" It hurts to be rejected on the basis of limited experience, but it's an employer's market out there, and businesses tend to play it safe when they can.

BUT…Do you know what changes everything and makes companies do backflips for you? When you have coveted, elite skills. I wrote the copy for a client's tumblr template sales page, and he told me sales were converting at 27% for him. My skills brought him real results (money). Maybe someone with a copywriting degree could do the same, but maybe not.

For the last two years, I have ignored the piece of paper that says I'm probably good at stuff, and instead I practice writing every day. I'm giving myself a chance by building my skills as <u>freelance marketer, writer, and blogger</u>.

Whether or not you go to college, and whether or not you want to work for yourself or for a company, build skills and experience in your desired field. And if you want to be even smarter, network heavily. These things matter; they bring results. And take it from me—don't expect your diploma to get you anywhere unless you have the applicable work experience and skills to go with it; having the ability to learn a skill set doesn't mean much when your competitors already have that skill set.

Grades distort our perception of reality

You can get straight As in school, but nobody, no matter how successful, gets straight As in life. No, in life, you tend to get As by getting Fs first. Lots and lots of Fs.

Stephen King probably still has his huge stack of publisher rejection slips. Those were "real world Fs," folks. Stephen King, one of the most successful authors in history, got dozens and dozens of Fs before he got his first real life A. School trains us to have the mindset that a given amount of effort will always bring a measurable, predictable, and successful result. The real world doesn't work like that.

Colonel Sanders had 1,009 rejections he received for his chicken recipe before the first yes. And many of his rejections were *humiliating, like an F- or something.* If you give an "A" effort in school, you succeed every time. If you give an "A" effort in life, you're lucky to succeed on the 30th try.

Successful blogger, author, and entrepreneur James Altucher said that about 17 out of his 20 businesses have failed. But the ones that did well were worth millions of dollars.

Photo by Twenty20.

When students enter the real world, and are turned down for a job in favor of the secretary's nephew, they will be mentally unprepared for it unless they learned outside of school. To put in a measured amount of work, compile an impressive resume, say all of the right things in the interview, and be turned down is a shock after predictable results for 20 years.

Perhaps the interviewer didn't like them because of an unfair, deep-rooted bias. Here's one example of clear "anti-Cyrus bias" I found on a forum:

> *"Today, at a job interview, I was asked what I thought of twerking (a Miley Cyrus dance move). It was a bizarre question, but trying to get on the interviewer's good side, I said I thought it was pretty cool. He snorted and said I'll be job-seeking for a while yet."*

Ouch.

If not biased, maybe the interviewer liked the early interviewees so much that later candidates never stood a chance, as was shown to be the case in a study covering 9,000 interviews. Or maybe they were simply misunderstood or underestimated. Whatever the case, an "A effort" does not always get an A result on the first try.
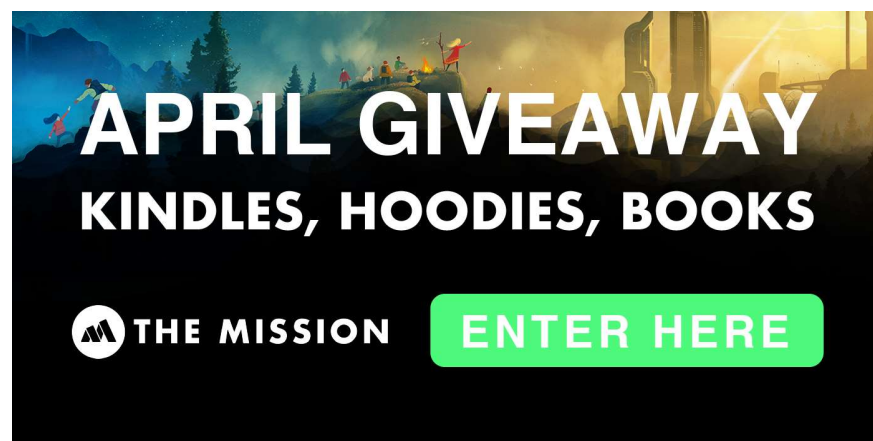
There will always be talented authors whose books remain unknown, superior athletes who never get a chance, and brilliant people who remain jobless. Meanwhile, some others who are in the limelight may not be deserving of it. Unlike test grades and GPAs, life is rarely fair.

The best thing about school preparing us to fail in the real world, is that while you can "flunk out" of school, you only flunk out of life if you give up. And even better than that, it only takes one great "A" to succeed. ☺

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