

to change lanes and go another direction within that same career!

Now permit me to meddle a little bit. As parents, we want our kids to know that God loves them and has a wonderful plan for their lives; right? But does it seem to them that everybody else has a plan for them? We must be careful not to project our desires for their vocation (perhaps because it's our vocation) and help them learn to follow God's desires for their future. Very few things in life cause more stress than trying to be somebody you are NOT! So it's important that we encourage our kids to be themselves so they can come to a place in their lives where they can say with certainty, "That's ME! This is how God made me! This is what I was created to do!"

Something my wife and I have tried to do is feed whatever interest our kids express by giving them the tools and opportunities required to explore that passion!

A little more meddling. Do you have the mindset that a higher education degree is critical for your sons or daughters to have a successful career? Please rethink this. Obviously, there are some career paths which require this, such as engineering, medical, law, etc., but there are many career options which can be achieved via apprenticeship training (earning while you learn) or other trades training programs. Too often the skilled trades are overlooked as an option – perhaps because this is not our background or because we have believed the lie that a college education is required for success in life. This lie has been pushed in the public school system for more than a half century. And buying into this for decades – along with the removal of shop classes – has created a massive gap in the skilled trade workforce in our country. For example, it is estimated in the next 10 years there will be a shortage of over 400,000 welders to fill the need in that craft. And it's a similar situation for other skilled trades.

Let me close with a personal story. In 1967, I was a freshman in high school and an FFA (Future Farmers of America) member. Part of that membership involved a vocational agriculture shop class, which included welding. We didn't have a welder at home and my dad didn't have those skills, so this was my first exposure to welding. This one semester in high school shop class was where I was introduced to welding, and this is what sparked (pun intended) my interest in the craft. I am so thankful my small rural town high school had a shop class and that I took advantage of the opportunity to be in FFA, because here I am, 52 years later with 48 years in the welding trade! And for the past 25 years I've owned and operated my own company, traveling all over this great country providing on-site welding training teaching others the skills and knowledge I've learned through a lifetime in my career. Most importantly, I am passionate about promoting my craft to others — especially to young people who, like me so many years ago, are looking for their niche in life! What's my point? You never know what experience will be a defining event that God will use to direct your sons or daughters in their journey toward a career!

One final word. The path to your sons' or daughters' discovery of the career path God has shaped them for is a process, a continuing journey, not a specific destination. Let's be diligent to encourage them in the process!

Rick and Dawn have four children, ages 16 through 27, who were homeschooled all the way through high school. They have six grandchildren. Rick is the owner/operator of Welding Training Solutions, Inc.



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