

# Don't Be a Helicopter Parent, Especially in This Job Market

Dear Stephen:

*My daughter is graduating from college in May. She is a philosophy major at a top university and has almost a 4.0 GPA. She has no idea what she wants to do when she graduates. When I pushed her over the holidays about her future job plans, she got annoyed and told me she has been interviewing with some startup, but I struggled to pry any other details from her. I pushed more as to the type of startup, and finally she said, "You know, like Google or Facebook in Silicon Valley, Dad."*

*Those companies are no longer startups, obviously, but that point was either lost on her, or she was just deflecting some more. Many of my friends' kids already know what they want to do; several want to go to graduate school, some have turned internships they liked into real jobs for when they graduate, and others are just interviewing all*

*over the place in fields they want to explore.*

*The more I push my daughter, the more she pushes back. I am concerned she is missing on-campus opportunities to interview — both as practice and to see if there is something that suits her.*

*What is a parent to do? I am trying not to be a helicopter parent, but after putting her through four years at an expensive school it is driving me crazy. It is the best economic climate to find a job in years, yet my daughter wants to just float around and find herself after I invested more than 240K in tuition. My God, what if she decides she wants to become an actor? Will I be footing the bill forever?*

**Father of the Prodigal Daughter**



You can send your workplace questions to Stephen at: [StephenSays@bellow.press](mailto:StephenSays@bellow.press).

Questions selected to be answered, will appear in this column. Please use the Subject: Stephen Says for all emails. Stephen Viscusi is a bestselling author, television personality, and CEO of The Viscusi Group, global executive recruiters located in New York. Follow Stephen on Twitter @WorkplaceGuru, Like Stephen on Facebook; and follow him on LinkedIn.

Dear Father,

As a parent myself, I have so many different reactions to your letter. On the one hand, I can't help but commiserate. I don't mean to overanalyze, but it seems to me most of this frustration comes from concern for your daughter. Unconditional love is the great blessing and the great curse of parenthood. Like you, I don't believe in false or overly positive reinforcement, which some people tend to confuse with love. I think if you are concerned about your daughter, you would be crazy not to be straight with her — especially about something as important as a career.

With all that said, I think you might be approaching this from a skewed angle. The actor remark is dissonant with your willingness to let her study philosophy for 60K a year. My point isn't that it was a bad decision, but rather that you should try to put everything in perspective. The price tag of your child's education does not equal your right to decide your child's career. I know some people who make very clear deals with their children about the conditions under which they will pay for their higher education. For example, someone I know wanted to major in English, but ended up studying engineering because his parents said they would only help him with college tuition if he did a pre-professional degree.

This isn't a parental advice column, so I won't deign to offer guidance on how to raise children, but I will say based on the young people I see entering the workforce, these conditions usually don't stop children from pursuing their interests.

As far as general advice for college students hoping to be gainfully employed right out of school and then into the future, the most important point is there really isn't any one way — especially in today's economy. Not having an internship or job in the summer before your junior or senior

year at college is often a mistake. But another school of thought claims kids that age are so impressionable internships put them on a path to a career they may regret years later because it was an easy first job. That is what happened to me, by the way, before I became a headhunter. Otherwise, you might be watching me on the "Today" show!

## The price tag of your child's education does not equal your right to decide your child's career.

Times have changed since we were coming out of college. It used to be there was one path to pretty much any profession. If you wanted to be a journalist, you got a job in a newsroom. If you wanted to be a lawyer, you got a job in a law firm. If you wanted to be a sales executive, you got a job in retail or started as a sales assistant in your field of interest. Those days, for better or worse, are gone. Philosophy majors head into big banks now, while math majors head out to Hollywood.

Just because people start down a path out of college, no longer does that mean they'll be in that profession 30 years down the

road or even five years out.

I know it is difficult to internalize this change, but this is how your daughter is thinking about her career. She might already know what she wants to do, or she might not. Either way, she will probably be fine and find her way. As you know, the job market is the best it's been in years. And more than anything, companies looking to hire young employees are looking for smart, driven, candidates. I like to say if you graduate from a top school with top grades, you walk into a job search with a big HIRE ME tattoo on your forehead; companies usually pay attention to those sorts of tattoos.

It's true internships and interview practice can speed up the job-search process coming out of college, but there is no single path anymore. As frustrating as it might be, I think you just need to trust your daughter. Be there to help her if she asks, but I doubt she'll need your help. It's time to let her grow up. You shouldn't be footing the bill for too much longer, particularly in this job market. No need to hover over her. Instead of being a helicopter parent, be a plane parent: Offer to help her get from point A to point B, but if she doesn't get on the plane, take off anyway.

**Stephen**